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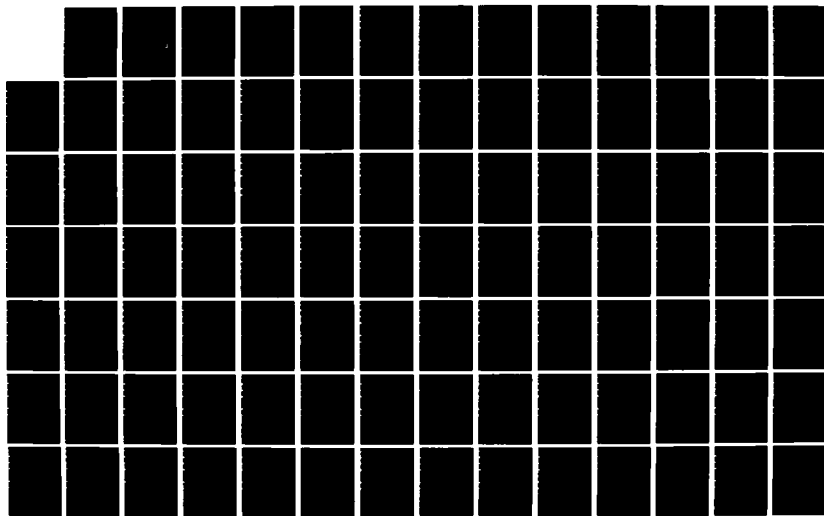
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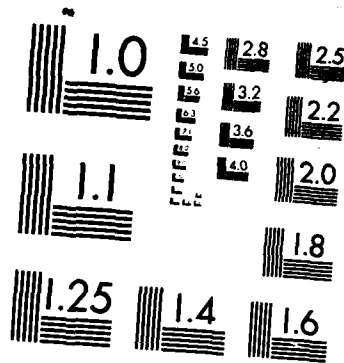
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How did China and Viet Nam each react to the crisis in their relations between 1975 and 1979? Why did the Chinese ultimately wage war against the Vietnamese? This work is an historical case study that addresses these central questions.

International crisis management case studies done by Allen Whiting, Ole Holsti, Alexander George, and Richard Smoke form a base for developing the analysis. Journalistic reports and government documents constitute the majority of primary source materials used.

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Both Hanoi and Beijing felt that the other posed a serious threat to its national security. Each side sought to communicate its concern to the other through a series of signals. The study focuses mainly on the pattern of Chinese signals, as Beijing responded to what it considered increasingly unacceptable behavior by Hanoi. The means of delivery, the rhetorical intensity, the level of issuing authority, and the relative timing of the signals all showed indications of escalating as the crisis became more severe.

The paper proposes an index of indicators by which to judge the progress of crisis development and crisis control. One of the chief difficulties in the Sino-Vietnamese dispute was a conflict of perceptions. Each side was using a different perspective in viewing its own and the other side's position. By using indicators to understand crisis development more fully, decision-makers may be able to exercise crisis management more effectively.

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A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army
Command and General Staff College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

by

MARK A. COYLE, CPT, USA

B.S., Georgetown University, 1968

M.A., University of Illinois, 1973

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ABSTRACT

THE SINO-VIETNAMESE CRISIS, 1975-1979: AN HISTORICAL CASE STUDY, by
Captain Mark A. Coyle, USA

How did China and Viet Nam each react to the crisis in their relations between 1975 and 1979? Why did the Chinese ultimately wage war against the Vietnamese? This work is an historical case study that addresses these central questions.

International crisis management case studies done by Allen Whiting, Ole Holsti, Alexander George, and Richard Smoke form a base for developing the analysis. Journalistic reports and government documents constitute the majority of the primary source materials used.

Both Hanoi and Beijing felt that the other posed a serious threat to its national security. Each side sought to communicate its concern to the other through a series of signals. The study focuses mainly on the pattern of Chinese signals, as Beijing responded to what it considered increasingly unacceptable behavior by Hanoi. The means of delivery, the rhetorical intensity, the level of issuing authority, and the relative timing of the signals all showed indications of escalating as the crisis became more severe.

The paper proposes an index of indicators by which to judge the progress of crisis development and crisis control. One of the chief difficulties in the Sino-Vietnamese dispute was a conflict of perceptions. Each side was using a different perspective in viewing its own and the other side's position. By using indicators to understand crisis development more fully, decision-makers may be able to exercise crisis management more effectively.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the special assistance given me in the preparation of this study by LTC Joseph A. Schlatter and Dr. Joseph R. Goldman. LTC Schlatter's detailed knowledge of Chinese strategy and Sino-Vietnamese relations was invaluable in interpreting the events that led to the 1979 war. Dr. Goldman--who holds two Ph.D.s, in history and in political science--helped give direction and scope to the study. Both gentlemen challenged me to explore the subject in greater depth and from perspectives I previously had not considered.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

The purpose of this study is to examine the events leading up to the 1979 war between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam (SRV) and to analyze these events in terms of the ways that China protects its strategic interests in Southeast Asia.

Background

The war between Communist China and Communist Viet Nam presented the world with an intriguing situation. Had not Zhou Enlai declared Beijing and Hanoi to be "as close as lips and teeth"? Had not Beijing been a staunch supporter of Hanoi in its thirty-year drive to conquer South Viet Nam? Why did relations between the two Communist states deteriorate? Why, indeed, did the PRC feel compelled to initiate armed hostilities against the SRV?

The history of Sino-Vietnamese relations, from the first millennium B.C. on, reveals animosity and conflicting interests. The imposition of Communist regimes in both countries did not change this. An examination and analysis of the events that precipitated the war may shed light on China's perception of its vital interests and strategic objectives. Such a study may aid in interpreting the signals China gives during a

crisis, especially as the crisis tends toward war.

Research Questions

This study of the Sino-Vietnamese crisis that developed after 1975 will explore several questions:

- (1) How has China perceived its strategic interests involving Viet Nam, Indochina, and Southeast Asia?
- (2) How does the history of Sino-Vietnamese relations elucidate China's feelings about Vietnamese independence and Vietnamese hegemony in Indochina?
- (3) In what respects has the PRC perceived Viet Nam to be a threat to Chinese interests since 1975?
- (4) How has China communicated its position to Viet Nam? What positive and negative signals did it give?
- (5) What actions has China taken when its signals have gone unheeded?
- (6) How did the Chinese and Vietnamese respond to the crisis which arose between 1975 and 1979? How did each side react under increasing stress.
- (7) Ultimately, what are the conditions under which China will go to war?

Limitations and Delimitations

The study covers primarily the period from 1975 to 1979, and it focuses on those incidents that led to the war. China and Viet Nam are the main actors discussed; but attention is given to the Soviet Union, the United States, and Cambodia in terms of the roles they played.

Significance of the Study

Determining what motivates the Chinese to fight and how much consistency there is in their warmaking policies is significant for American strategic planning in East Asia.

Subsequent Chapters

The second chapter of this thesis surveys the principal literature that is applicable to the Sino-Vietnamese crisis of the late 1970s.

Chapter three explores a methodological approach to analyzing the events. Several theories dealing with deterrence and crisis behavior are examined.

The fourth chapter traces the events that culminated in the actual fighting in 1979. It treats briefly the long history of discord that has existed between China and Viet Nam and questions whether the two countries were ever "as close as lips and teeth." China and Viet Nam had interests and objectives in Indochina which often came into conflict. Chapter four then focuses on the actions of the PRC and the SRV between 1975 and 1979 that brought on the war. Particular consideration is given to those moves of Hanoi that Beijing found intolerable and the manner in which the Chinese leadership sought to signal its displeasure to the Vietnamese and to manage the crisis.

Chapter five draws general conclusions based on the research questions. Ultimately, what are the conditions under which China will go to war?

Chapter 2

SURVEY OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The Survey of the Literature will be restricted to those items that have a direct bearing on the Sino-Vietnamese crisis of 1975-1979 and its interpretation. Broader historical sources and analyses are included in the bibliography.

Analytical Models

Alexander George and Richard Smoke have analyzed deterrence theory in detail in their work Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice. They examine several models of deterrence and crisis behavior. One of their main contentions is that these theories must be tested by historical case studies. The work is valuable because it points the way to a greater understanding of the operation of deterrence through historical analysis.

Ole R. Holsti has done a large amount of work investigating the ways in which decisions are made by national leaders in crisis situations. In "The 1914 Case," American Political Science Review, June, 1965 and in Crisis, Escalation, War, Holsti maintains that leaders do not usually respond with cool calculation in times of crises and that the signals they give one another are not always clear and easily understood. This is important because theories of deterrence and crisis

management generally assume mutual understanding and rational decisions.

Decision in crisis is also treated by Oran Young in The Politics of Force: Bargaining During International Crises. Young looks at the spectrum of coercion by which nations try to influence one another.

The work of Allen Whiting is also valuable to this thesis. Whiting has done two detailed historical case studies of the PRC's entry into wars. China Crosses the Yalu: The Decision to Enter the Korean War analyzes the prelude to the PRC's going into Korea in 1950; and The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence: India and Indochina considers the events leading up to the Sino-Indian War of 1962. Whiting holds that Chinese leaders have proved to be very cautious in their warmaking policies, that they do not go to war without good reasons (from their standpoint), and that they give clear signals that a military action will be taken before they actually commit troops.

All of these works will help to guide the direction of this research.

Documentary Materials

Chinese

Ren Min Ri Bao (People's Daily) is the national PRC daily newspaper. It is of special value to this study. The official, authoritative line of the Chinese Communist leadership is presented to the world in this paper. It has also been one of the chief vehicles by which the Chinese have issued signals and warnings to their adversaries in times of crisis, and it renders official interpretation of the activities of those adversaries. Additionally, Ren Min Ri Bao performs the

traditional function of a newspaper in reporting the news. Its value as a source of raw fact, however, must be tempered by the realization that it is a Communist government paper.

Hong Qi (Red Flag) is the official paper of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). It has virtues and vices similar to those of Ren Min Ri Bao, although it is narrower in scope and not used as extensively as a vehicle for public announcements of national policy.

Beijing Radio, chiefly as monitored by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), reinforces the proclamations of Ren Min Ri Bao and gives news items.

Xin Hua She (New China News Agency) is the official news service of the PRC. It is a good source for tracing events as reported from the Chinese perspective.

The PRC puts out a news-and-views magazine in English and other foreign languages: Beijing Review (formerly Peking Review). Beijing Review publishes articles from various Chinese official sources, often Ren Min Ri Bao, and again presents those opinions to the world that the PRC leadership considers to be very important.

In 1981 an interesting book was published by Kingsway International Publications in Hong Kong: The Sino-Vietnamese War by Li Man Kin. This work is on the margins of being a documentary source. Li Man Kin is a former editor of Ta Kung Pao, a semi-official, pro-Beijing Hong Kong newspaper. It is amazingly frank in its assessment of the PRC's shortcomings in the war. The work is quite useful in analyzing the military operation itself, for it has good battle maps and a reasonably detailed description of the action. It is also replete with pictures.

The treatment that the Overseas Chinese received at the hands of the Vietnamese was a factor in the late 1970s crisis. The PRC's Foreign

Language Press has published On Viet Nam's Expulsion of Chinese Residents, and Rewi Alley has published from China Refugees from Viet Nam in China. Both of these works recount the difficulties of the Chinese in Communist Viet Nam, but more important they give an indication of the reasons that Beijing considered them so important in the late 1970s.

Vietnamese

The SRV's official newspapers Nhan Dan (The People) and Quan Doi Nhan Dan (The People's Military) are similar in function to Ren Min Ri Bao and Hong Qi respectively. They are valuable sources for discerning the official views of the Hanoi leadership. Likewise, the Vietnamese Communists often give their warnings and signals in these organs.

Tap Chi Cong San (Communist Practice) is Hanoi's leading journal of theory. It is very useful in helping the reader understand long range Vietnamese government policy.

Hanoi Radio is a good source of specific news items as is the Viet Nam News Agency. These sources were especially useful during the actual fighting of February and March of 1979 because at that time the Vietnamese presented considerable coverage of the war.

The Vietnamese have submitted their brief against China in several small works: Chinese Aggression Against Vietnam: The Root of the Problem, The Chinese Aggression: How and Why It Failed, and "The Truth about Vietnam-China Relations over the Last 30 Years." These works assert that the PRC has not abandoned the tributary outlook on foreign affairs that characterized imperial China. They express Viet Nam's frustration with its giant neighbor.

Third Party

Two US government sources are particularly useful for this study. The first is China-Vietnam Border Tensions: A Chronology, 22 June 1976-5 May 1981. This work summarizes the incidents that manifested the crisis and gives the primary source citations. The second source is the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), which monitors the news organs of countries around the world. The FBIS reports do much of the tedious spade work for the researcher.

General Materials

Journals

Several important articles dealing with the Sino-Vietnamese War have appeared in English language journals. The first to come out was "China's 'Punitive' War On Vietnam: A Military Assessment," Asian Survey, August, 1979 by LTC Harlan Jencks. Jencks asserts that the main reason for the PRC attack was to prove to the Vietnamese that they could not challenge Beijing with impunity. He goes on to give a general outline of the military operations and concludes that in the end, "the Chinese authorities. . .probably lost more than they gained." For Daniel Tretiak there are no "probablies" about it. In his article "China's Vietnam War and its Consequences," China Quarterly, December, 1979, Tretiak maintains that the PRC's goals were largely unrealized. Moreover, Tretiak does not see the same pattern of signalling by the Chinese that occurred prior to the Korean War. A third article is "The Sino-Vietnamese War: Causes, Conduct, and Consequences," Parameters,

September, 1979 by LTC Charles R. Nelson. Nelson places the war in the context of the Sino-Soviet dispute. Unlike Tretiak, he does not perceive the consequences of the war for China to be particularly dire. He sees the continuing drain on Soviet resources in its effort to support the SRV to be an important benefit for Beijing.

In addition to the journals indicated above, the The Journal of Asian Studies is a good source for articles, book reviews, and chronologies.

The weekly news magazine Far Eastern Economic Review together with its Asia Yearbook is an outstanding source of material on East Asia. Published in Hong Kong, it has excellent coverage of the news of the region. The articles offer considerable analysis.

Wen Wei Pao is a pro-Beijing newspaper published in Hong Kong. It has connections with the PRC and enjoys a semi-official status. As such it is a good source for understanding current PRC policies and perceptions.

The Bangkok Post offers good coverage of events in Indochina and is quite useful in tracing Hanoi's operations in Cambodia.

Books

The Third Indochina Conflict is a compendium of articles edited by David W. P. Elliott. In it the authors discuss the numerous problems that beset the Hanoi regime after 1975 and how the Vietnamese leadership reacted to them. It is especially good in analyzing the China-Cambodia-Viet Nam dilemma.

The China Factor: Sino-American Relations and the Global Scene, edited by Richard Solomon, considers China's changing relationship with the countries of Southeast Asia. The chapters written by Lucien Pye and

Harry Harding question whether Beijing and Hanoi were ever very close, even during the halcyon days of international Communist cooperation.

Nguyen Van Canh's Vietnam Under Communism holds that the Communist regime in Hanoi seeks domination of all Southeast Asia. It is written from the perspective of an anti-Communist Vietnamese nationalist.

Douglas Pike looks at the Sino-Vietnamese crisis in an article in The Sino-Soviet Conflict: A Global Perspective, edited by Herbert Ellison. Pike asserts that since 1975 Hanoi has been trying to break the traditional influence that China historically has exerted over the Vietnamese. Hanoi, Pike maintains, has not become a client of Moscow but rather is using the Soviets as a balance against the Chinese.

In The Wars in Vietnam, 1954-1980, Edgar O'Ballance gives a good narrative of the events of 1975-80. He holds that the Chinese have been successful in deterring Vietnamese subversion in Thailand.

Chapter 3

A METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to examine various methodological approaches to deterrence and crisis behavior along with two major historical case studies of the PRC's entry into war. A synthesis of these theories will be used as a guide to the investigation of the Sino-Vietnamese crisis of 1975-1979.

A Theory of Deterrence

Alexander George and Richard Smoke have made an extensive study of deterrence theory in Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice. They define deterrence as "the persuasion of one's opponent that the costs and/or risks of a given course of action he might take outweigh its benefits."¹ George and Smoke contend that, in the past, leaders have perceived the concept of deterrence too narrowly and too negatively. To be more effective, it must become part of a broader policy of influence that relies on positive inducement as well as on threats of punishment. This influence should seek to reduce the level² of conflict and buy time to allow crisis situations to pass. The authors criticize abstract, prescriptive models of deterrence for not portraying what actually happens in a crisis situation, and they assert that deterrence theory needs to be examined in the light of historical³ experience. They seek a research methodology for this.

What seems required . . . is a research methodology which is capable of differentiating and identifying the variations in a number of relevant decision-making variables from one set of deterrence circumstances to another and assessing their significance, while remaining "cumulable" across multiple cases.⁴

George and Smoke have constructed an analytic guide for doing an historical case study of a crisis situation. It is designed to shed light on the interactions of states as crises develop.

- (1) Examine the principal's valuation of its interests and objectives.
- (2) Examine the adversary's valuation of its interests and objectives.
- (3) Determine the principal's perception of the threat the adversary poses.
- (4) Consider the policy options the principal believes are open.
- (5) Trace the formulation of the principal's perceived options and the requirements and constraints that those options bring.
- (6) Determine whether the principal has contingency plans if deterrence fails.
- (7) Identify those signals the principal sends to the adversary.
- (8) Consider the adversary's perceptions of the principal's deterrence posture (e.g. commitment, capability, resolve) and the risks of continued defiance.
- (9) Evaluate the adversary's reassessment of its activities in reaction to the deterrence signals.

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The authors point out several mistakes national leaders often make in applying deterrence. There is a tendency to assume a one-on-one scenario when a multiplicity of players are actually involved. The efficacy of threat over more positive inducements frequently is presumed; and within the framework of threat, military means are those most preferred. Leaders are wont to consider first military and material capabilities without taking into account the implications of effective

strategy or home support. Perhaps most serious of all, though, is the fact that leaders who wish to deter generally assume that their signals are being received and understood by the adversary, and that the adversary is making logical decisions therefrom.⁶

Decisions under Stress

Ole Holsti has investigated how national decision-makers act under the stress of international crisis. In "The 1914 Case," American Political Science Review, June, 1965 and in Crisis, Escalation, and War, Holsti shows that "rational" decision making is not the general rule during crises. National leaders become preoccupied with the short term over the long term, and they become convinced that their own options are considerably narrower than those of their adversaries. Their communications and signals become more stereotyped and confusing. This works against deterrence and crisis resolution.⁷

According to Holsti skillful crisis management bears several hallmarks. The principal is aware of the adversary's frame of reference and realizes the constraints under which the adversary is operating. The principal always leaves an opening through which the adversary can withdraw. A carrot and stick combination of inducements is used rather than just one or the other. As the crisis develops the skillful manager makes every effort to slow the pace of critical events. Finally, the national leadership makes certain that its decisions are not preempted or finessed by outside forces.⁸

Historical Case Studies

In two books, China Crosses the Yalu: The Decision to Enter the Korean War and The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence: India and Indochina, Allen Whiting has analyzed the Chinese decisions to go to war in Korea in 1950 and in India in 1962. Whiting poses the questions of why China reacts in the manner that it does and how it makes its decisions. He concludes that the PRC goes to war for good reasons, centered around strategic security concerns, and that it gives repeated warnings beforehand.

General Similarities, 1950 and 1962

Several similarities exist between the Korean and Indian crises. The domestic situation in the PRC was unsettled. Beijing perceived an immediate threat along its borders. The specter of encirclement presented itself to the Chinese leadership. The crises developed over a period of months, allowing Beijing to employ its "calculus of deterrence"; but continuing enemy challenges to its credibility drew the PRC into military actions, for which it was not totally prepared. Finally, Beijing had to contend with Moscow's maneuvers.⁹

"Threats and Their Deterrence as Seen from Beijing"¹⁰

Whiting defines the "Chinese calculus of deterrence" as the "general strategy [that] underlies persistent patterns of behavior aimed at persuading a perceived opponent that the costs of his continuing conflictual activity will eventually prove unacceptable to him because of

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the Chinese response." He further codifies the principles of the calculus according to the following scheme.

Threats and Their Deterrence as seen from Beijing

1. The worse our domestic situation, the more likely our external situation will worsen.
 - a) A superior power in proximity will seek to take advantage of our domestic vulnerability.
 - b) Two or more powers will combine against us if they can temporarily overcome their own conflicts of interest.
 - c) We must prepare for the worst and try for the best.
2. The best deterrence is belligerence.
 - a) To be credible, move military force; words do not suffice.
 - b) To be diplomatic, leave the enemy 'face' and a way out.
 - c) To be prudent, leave yourself an 'option.'
 - d) If at first you don't succeed, try again but more so.
3. Correct timing is essential.
 - a) Warning must be given early when a threat is perceived but not yet imminent.
 - b) The rhythm of signals must permit the enemy to respond and us to confirm the situation.
 - c) We must control our moves and not respond to the enemy's choice.¹²

Chinese Signals

Whiting is especially interested in the signals that the PRC gives as part of its deterrence calculus. The signals can be divided into three broad categories: (1) verbal warnings, (2) troop maneuvers, and (3) rapid attacks followed by a general disengagement as the final warning. In the verbal warnings Whiting traces a pattern of escalation in rhetoric and a use of key phrases to indicate that another phase line has been crossed on the road to actual military conflict.

Examples of Verbal Warnings: Korea, 1950

22 Sep Ren Min Ri Bao announces that the Chinese "will always stand on the side of the Korean people."

25 Sep Nie Rongzhen, Acting Chief of Staff of the PLA, informs Indian ambassador K. M. Panikkar that Beijing will not "sit back with folded hands and let the Americans come to the border."

30 Sep Zhou Enlai declares: "The Chinese people . . . will not supinely tolerate seeing their neighbors being savagely invaded by the imperialists."

02 Oct Zhou gives Panikkar official notification that, if the United States crosses the 38th parallel, the PRC will enter the war.

10 Oct The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Beijing formally announces: "The Chinese people cannot stand by idly with regard to . . . the invasion of Korea by the United States and its accomplices and with regard to the dangerous trend toward extending the war."¹³

Examples of Verbal Warnings: India, 1962
(MFA Protests)

22 Jul "The Chinese government can by no means sit idly by while its frontier guards are being encircled and annihilated by aggressors."

27 Aug "The Chinese side will have to resort to self-defense."

05 Sep "The Indian Government . . . should be aware that whoever plays with fire will hurt himself."

13 Sep "He who plays with fire will eventually be consumed by fire.

Chinese border defense forces are duty bound to defend their territory."

21 Sep "The situation is extremely dangerous, and the flames of war may break out there."

25 Sep "In the face of increasingly frantic armed attacks by the aggressive Indian troops, the Chinese frontier guards cannot but take resolute measures of self-defense."

03 Oct "Whenever India attacks, China is sure to strike back."

11 Oct "Should the Indian side still not rein in before the precipice but continue to spread the flames of war, the Indian Government must

bear full responsibility for the resulting casualties on both sides and all other consequences that may ensue." ¹⁴

The signals given by the Chinese government occur at fairly regular intervals and conform to a conscious rhythm according to Whiting. This gives the other side time to take notice and respond, and it gives the Chinese side time to prepare for the next step. Beijing develops a number of alternatives. If the opposing side reacts in a manner that Beijing perceives to be less threatening, longer intervals will occur between warnings until they taper off altogether. Whiting maintains that this happened during the 1962 Taiwan crisis and during the American involvement in Viet Nam, when Washington was able to convince Beijing that the United States did not pose a threat to China's security. On the other hand, if the opposing side remains threatening in Beijing's opinion, then the warnings will increase in tempo and intensity. This happened with the Korean and Indian crises. In short, the PRC posits phase lines in its escalation of deterrence to exert as much control over the situation as possible, to reassess changing conditions, to prepare for military operations as necessary, and to avoid a precipitant stumbling into war when it might be prevented.

When verbal signals do not produce the desired result, the PLA commences military movements into the crisis area. The military actions, however, are also phased in order to give one last deterrence signal. The following scheme reflects the build up to full-scale war in Korea and India.

Korean Crisis, 1950

25 Sep Nie Rongzhen tells Panikkar the PRC will intervene if US troops come to the Yalu.

02 Oct Zhou tells Panikkar the PRC will intervene if US forces cross the 38th parallel.

26 Oct The PLA attacks South Korean troops near the Yalu.

02 Nov The PLA attacks US troops near the Yalu.

07 Nov The PLA disengages along the entire front.

26 Nov The PLA launches a massive general offensive along the entire front.

Indian Crisis, 1962

13 Sep The PRC proposes talks with India and cautions New Delhi against being consumed by fire.

20 Sep The PLA attacks at various spots on the border and disengages.

30 Oct The PLA launches a general attack and drives into Indian territory.

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20 Nov Beijing announces a cease-fire and withdrawal.

This is a very brief outline of Whiting's theory of Chinese deterrence and of his two historical case studies analyzing that theory.

Methodology for This Thesis

All of the authors cited in this chapter make use of the historical case study to explain the development of crises and the manner in which the parties concerned try to manage these crises. By use of a systematic methodology in doing this, they hope to elucidate both the manner in which nations interact and the efficacy of their actions. The ultimate practical effect of this is in the perception of generalities and consistencies that would lead to better crisis management. At a minimum it should yield a clearer understanding of the historical reasons and methods for a given nation's actions during a time of intense international confrontation.

The main purpose of this paper is to analyze the developing crisis between China and Viet Nam from 1975 to 1979 as an historical case study. First, several important crisis points in Sino-Vietnamese relations during that period are identified. Second, the study examines Beijings's handling of these crises in terms of its perception of its interests and objectives, and the threat that it perceives Viet Nam poses to those interests and objectives. It also considers China's sensitivity to Viet Nam's interests. Third, the paper looks at the gamut of signals issued by the Chinese and their reception by the Vietnamese. The nature, intensity, authority, and timing of the signals are considered. An index of indicators is drawn up to trace the Chinese responses within these variables. Fourth, the study determines the relative efficacy of Beijing's actions, examining them in light of Holsti's hypotheses regarding the proper perceptions of time, of alternatives, and of communication. Fifth, the concept of Chinese deterrence is examined to determine how the strategy of limited, punitive war is used.

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Chapter 4

TRACING THE TROUBLES

Background

A Tradition of Troubles

China and Viet Nam have had a long history of troubled relations. Vietnamese civilization grew up in the Red River delta in the latter half of the first millennium BC, while an expanding Chinese empire exerted pressure on it from the north. In 111 BC Han Wudi incorporated the Red River delta and the early Vietnamese into the Han dynasty's domains. The Chinese called their new acquisition An Nam (the Peaceful South), and it remained the southernmost province of the Chinese empire until AD 939. In rather typical colonial fashion, the Chinese administrators in Viet Nam¹ regarded the indigenous inhabitants with condescension; and the Vietnamese, for their part, frequently tried to assert their independence, often rising up in rebellion. Nevertheless, the brilliance of Chinese culture and civilization was not lost on the Vietnamese, who adopted much of it for their own. This, too, led to a not untypical colonial phenomenon: ambivalent feelings of the colonized toward the colonizers. In their role as little brother, the Vietnamese both admired and despised their big brother, the Chinese. This duality of passions was to continue throughout the history of Sino-Vietnamese relations.²

Viet Nam gained its independence in 939, after the collapse of the Tang dynasty in China; and, shortly after the establishment of the Song dynasty in 960, it became part of the Chinese tributary system, which allowed China's influence to continue through a more indirect method. At the same time, Viet Nam began its own imperialist drive into Indochina, thereby developing another ongoing theme in Sino-Vietnamese relations. As the Vietnamese pushed south and west, the Chinese would often ally themselves with the peoples astride Viet Nam's advance, viz. the Chams and the Khmers, to block Viet Nam's expansionism. Between 1075 and 1079, the Song Chinese assisted the Chams and Khmers in defeating the Vietnamese and thus postponed their southward movement. For a short time, the Song occupied considerable parts of Vietnamese territory. Viet Nam had to face two subsequent major incursions from the north. The Mongols ravaged much of the Red River delta in the middle of the thirteenth century, taking Hanoi in 1257. Climate, terrain, and fierce Vietnamese resistance, however, caused them to withdraw without absorbing Viet Nam into the Yuan dynasty. When the Ming dynasty asserted itself in foreign ventures, Viet Nam was once more colonized. The period of direct Chinese domination was short, from 1409 to 1428; but it reaffirmed to the Vietnamese that China would always seek to dominate³ them when the opportunity presented itself.

During the latter part of the sixteenth century, both China and Viet Nam were experiencing considerable difficulties. In China the Ming dynasty was in terminal decline, and in Viet Nam two hostile clans--the Trinh in the north and the Nguyen in the south--had effectively divided the country. The Ming fell in 1644 and was presently replaced by the Qing dynasty of the Manchus. In Hanoi the Trinh clan eagerly sought the patronage of the newly established Qing dynasty, while in the south the

Nguyen domains became a haven for many Ming loyalist refugees. The Nguyen were not as enthusiastic about a Chinese connection as the were the Trinh, but they used the Chinese immigrants to help them in their drive to conquer Cambodia.

Chinese armies once again invaded Viet Nam in 1788. They sought to take advantage of disunion and rebellion within Viet Nam in order to reassert a larger measure of Chinese influence. They captured Hanoi and occupied the city for two weeks, but they were soon defeated by a Vietnamese army and withdrew from the country.

In 1802 the Nguyen were able to conclude a successful war against the Trinh and unite all of Viet Nam; however, in doing so, they had enlisted the aid of a small group of French freebooters, which was to contribute to France's getting its foot in the door.⁴ The French began absorbing Indochina bit by bit, starting with the South, in the middle of the nineteenth century. As they approached China's borders in the 1880s, Beijing became alarmed and began to oppose their efforts. This culminated in the Sino-French war of 1883-85. (Growing French hegemony in Indochina did not constitute the only reason for this war, but it was one of the major contributing factors.)⁵

Cooperation against Colonialism

During the first half of the twentieth century, there was a large measure of common interest between the nationalistic Chinese and Vietnamese in thwarting the encroachments of the colonial powers and in developing modern, independent national states. The Guomindang (GMD) (Nationalist Party) in China supported the nationalist movement in Viet Nam, especially the Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang (Viet Nam Nationalist Party),

which was pattern after the Chinese GMD. Likewise, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) lent support to its counterpart, the Indochina Communist Party (ICP). Even within the framework of internationalist cooperation, however, tensions arose. The GMD jailed Ho Chi Minh repeatedly; and, when GMD troops entered northern Viet Nam in 1945 to accept the Japanese surrender at the end of World War II, they rampaged through the countryside and showed definite signs of wanting to set up more than a temporary occupation. This once more stirred Vietnamese bitterness toward the Chinese and seemed to confirm China's imperialist desire to dominate Viet Nam.⁶

In 1946 both China and Viet Nam became engulfed in internal wars. China's ended in 1949 with a Communist victory. The Chinese Communists then went on to give significant aid to the Communist-led Viet Minh in Indochina. This helped the Viet Minh to prevail against the French in 1954.⁷

The Geneva Convention

A convention was called at Geneva in 1954 to deal with the problems of Korea and Indochina. In attendance at the Indochina sessions were representatives from the United States, the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, the State of Viet Nam (non-Communist), the Viet Minh, France, Britain, Cambodia, and Laos. The maneuvers and machinations that took place at the Geneva Convention have long been the subject of controversy and recrimination. Viet Nam was divided between the Communist North and the non-Communist South. After years of fighting, the Communists got only half of the loaf. Significantly, the PRC supported the partition, and there is evidence that it pressured the Viet Minh into accepting it.⁸ Could the Vietnamese Communists have gained control

over the whole country by walking out of the negotiations and back onto the battle field? Was Beijing deliberately trying to insure that an independent Viet Nam remained weak and divided? Douglas Pike believes that the Communist forces in Viet Nam were largely exhausted in 1954 and⁹ that the Viet Minh were as eager for peace as anybody else. Therefore, the deal may not have been as bad for them as they were to assert later when they maintained that they had been finessed out of half the country. On the other hand, the PRC gave some indications that a "neutralized"¹⁰ Indochina was not altogether unattractive from their point of view.

The Viet Nam War and the Sino-Soviet Dispute

The Vietnamese Communists generally tried to walk the line between their brethren in Moscow and Beijing, and from 1950 through early 1973 they were indeed able to tack rather successfully between the Chinese and the Soviets. It is possible to discern six phases of Vietnamese Communist maneuvers during this period.

From 1950 to 1956, they were on good terms with both of the Communist giants. The Sino-Soviet rift had not yet opened, and these were the halcyon days of international Communist cooperation and solidarity. Nevertheless, Ho's regime was rather closer to the Chinese than to the Soviets at this time. From 1950 to 1954, the PRC was providing a sanctuary for Viet Minh troops and was giving considerable aid and assistance to them in the war against the French. The Vietnamese Communists also looked to the Chinese revolutionary experience as a model for the Vietnamese revolution.

Between 1957 and 1960, the fledgling Democratic Republic of Viet Nam (DRV) moved closer to the Soviets. Hanoi began to develop an inkling of distrust over the presence in North Viet Nam of those large numbers of Chinese advisors, who had proved so valuable during the war but who now did not seem especially eager to depart. The North Vietnamese were also anxious to begin industrialization, and in this the Soviet model appeared more appropriate than the Chinese. Hanoi wanted the advanced aid that the Soviets, not the Chinese, could provide. During this period there were frequent visits of Soviet and Chinese dignitaries back and forth between Moscow and Hanoi. Finally, the PRC's disastrous Three Red Banners campaign from 1958 to 1960 largely disabused the Vietnamese of the efficacy of the Chinese model.

The Sino-Soviet split came into the open in 1960. At the same time, Hanoi was commencing operations aimed at subjugating South Viet Nam and feared that hostility between the USSR and the PRC might distract them from the fraternal socialist support that the North Vietnamese had been anticipating. Therefore, from 1960 to 1963, Hanoi tried to play a mediating role between Moscow and Beijing. The PRC tried to recoup some of its waning stature with the North Vietnamese by promises of increased support.

Between 1963 and 1965, the DRV swung toward the PRC in the Sino-Soviet dispute. Hanoi suspected that Khrushchev's policy of peaceful coexistence and agreement with the United States on a nuclear test ban signalled a slide back in Soviet support for world-wide Communist insurgency movements. Most of the DRV leadership preferred Beijing's more bellicose rhetoric; and the ideological purists in Hanoi, e.g. Le Duan, held sway. The DRV often joined ranks with the PRC in criticizing Soviet revisionism; yet Hanoi refused to denounce Moscow.

In 1964 the North Vietnamese, having enjoyed some successes with the guerrilla war in the South, decided to push for a quick victory by a large escalation of the war effort. The PRC tended not to support this, urging the Vietnamese Communists to continue to apply the Maoist strategy of protracted warfare. At the same time, Khrushchev had been ousted in the Soviet Union, and the new Kremlin leadership had decided to take a more aggressive course in backing "wars of national liberation." Moscow was now maneuvering to support Hanoi both ideologically and materially, while Beijing was singing a rather different ideological tune and did not have the material means to back Hanoi's ambitions. As a result the DRV moved back toward the USSR in 1964 and 1965.

The United States began massive aid to Saigon in 1965, and South Vietnamese resistance to a Communist take over stiffened. Hanoi had failed to achieve its quick victory and now came to accept that the war would be long and bitter. With this prospect, the North Vietnamese recognized that they would need all the help they could get and had no desire to alienate either of their patrons. Therefore, the period of 1965-73 was one of official North Vietnamese neutrality in the Sino-Soviet rivalry. Nevertheless, the DRV edged gradually closer to the USSR. There were several reasons for this. As the war intensified, the North Vietnamese became increasingly dependent on sophisticated Soviet military equipment, especially the antiaircraft systems that defended the homeland against American bombers. The North Vietnamese Army (NVA), headed by Vo Nguyen Giap, became more influential in DRV politics. The officers of the NVA preferred Soviet hardware to the Maoist philosophy of protracted war, and Giap was the leader of the most pro-Soviet and anti-Chinese faction in Hanoi. Internal Chinese

politics, especially the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, caused severe strains in Sino-Vietnamese relations. Vietnamese officials in the PRC were attacked and beaten by Red Guards, and Soviet arms shipments traversing the PRC by rail on their way to the DRV were interdicted and looted.¹¹ The notion of the People's War, i.e. protracted warfare based on the Maoist model, was heralded by Lin Biao and became the strategic military orthodoxy during the Cultural Revolution. In spite of the bellicose bluster of its rhetoric, Lin Biao's formulation of People's War was a manifestation of the PRC's turn inward. Chinese Communism was redefining itself, and this was a time of considerable introversion for the PRC. Zhou Enlai, who held the reins of foreign policy as best he could, wanted no foreign ventures during this period of China's self-induced weakness. Finally, Hanoi became particularly provoked with Beijing over the PRC's rapprochement with the United States in 1971-72. This was balanced, however, by the DRV's displeasure with the development of the US-USSR detente. Yet Hanoi had to bear all¹² of this in relative silence, for there was no place else to go.

Era of the Paris Peace Accords

Beijing was critical of Hanoi when the latter agreed to enter into peace talks with the United States in April 1968, while Moscow supported the DRV in this maneuver. The Chinese were in the last gasps of the ideological radicalism of the Cultural Revolution at this time and saw the talks as a betrayal of the People's War. They even threatened the North Vietnamese with a cut off of aid. Beijing also suspected a Soviet ploy to control Hanoi more closely. However, in 1969 the PRC did an about face and began to support the Paris negotiations. Not only did

the Chinese support the talks, but they soon became champions of moderation. In 1971 Mao urged Pham Van Dong to emulate Beijing's handling of the Taiwan problem, i.e. that Hanoi exercise patience.¹³ This, too, reflected internal Chinese politics as well as its perceptions of foreign affairs. The Ninth CCP Congress in 1969 decided to abort the violence of the Cultural Revolution and to pursue a somewhat more moderate path. The Cultural Revolution had torn China apart and weakened it considerably. Beijing became nervous over its vulnerability as it witnessed the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, which was justified by the very dangerous Brezhnev doctrine. A series of fierce border clashes took place between the Chinese and Soviets during 1969 as well. The Chinese leadership was now interested in keeping the lid on a very explosive situation. It was in this atmosphere that they embarked upon their strategy of rapprochement with the United States and reconciliation in Southeast Asia. Consequently, the Chinese may not have been too displeased when the Paris Peace Accords were made official on 27 January 1973.¹⁴

By 1973 the Chinese had begun to sober up from the binge of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution and were seeing their national interests rather more clearly. The United States was no longer perceived to be the great threat to China's southern regions. The Soviet Union stood as the undisputed number one enemy, and China's main strategic objective in Indochina was to thwart the development of Soviet power in that area. A divided Viet Nam with a continuing American influence in the South could be helpful in accomplishing this mission; and, according to the North Vietnamese, this is precisely what the Chinese sought. They assert that Zhou Enlai told them to stand down militarily and not try to conquer the South and that Zhou offered Chinese economic

assistance but no military aid. Stephen B. Young, who served with the State Department in Viet Nam and was close to Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, has reported that Beijing even offered aid to Saigon in the waning days of the war.

After the Paris Peace Agreements were signed in 1973, Peking sent Thieu a letter through the good offices of Singapore's Lee Kwan Yew. Fearful of the consequences, Thieu did not reply. Then weeks before the collapse of Saigon in 1975, Peking again approached Thieu. This time the Chinese used his brother as a contact and offered to support South Vietnam against Hanoi if Thieu would open a few doors to power for the NLF [National Liberation Front]. Reeling from the collapse of his armies, Thieu had no courage for such a dramatic gamble.¹⁶

The Hanoi leadership considered that the DRV's interests would be served best by taking South Viet Nam at the first possible opportunity. The North Vietnamese perceived Beijing's foreign policy as a modern version of traditional Han chauvinism, with Viet Nam to play the role of tributary state to the court at Beijing. Those who had been angered by China's willingness to accept a divided Viet Nam at Geneva now saw history repeating itself. Many in Hanoi reasoned that the PRC simply wanted to keep Viet Nam in a constantly weakened state. This is why the Chinese had always urged protracted war and why they had originally opposed the Paris talks. As long as the war continued, Viet Nam would remain divided, and the United States and the Soviet Union would be at odds. Thus, the PRC could occupy the hill top while several tigers fought below. Once the negotiations got underway, however, China risked becoming the odd man out and quickly scrambled to get into the act. Now Beijing urged Hanoi to observe the agreements scrupulously, to leave the Thieu government be, again with the ultimate goal of keeping Viet Nam weak and divided.¹⁷ After the SRV Foreign Ministry published this perspective in its October 1979 White Book, the PRC issued a categorical¹⁸ denial of the allegations.

The North Vietnamese began their final offensive in January 1975. Saigon surrendered on 30 April. After years of courageous resistance, South Viet Nam had become totally exhausted--morally and physically. Its long-time patron, the United States, was itself experiencing a series of unprecedented internal crises and could not come to its aid. Beijing cheered, along with much of the rest of the world, as NVA tanks smashed through the gates of the Presidential Palace in Saigon; yet, as the preceding paragraphs demonstrate, a tradition of thousands of years of troubles dies hard.¹⁹

A Theme

A general theme appears in this examination of the history of Sino-Vietnamese relations. In his study of the Sino-French war of the 1880s, Henry McAleavy makes the following observation.

If there is one lesson for China to draw from the events of the last century and a quarter it is that military weakness on her part constitutes an irresistible invitation to aggression from abroad, and that Vietnam, under the control of a potential enemy, must always form a peculiarly lethal threat to her national security.²⁰

This is a lesson more appropriately learned by the Vietnamese than the Chinese, for the Chinese have long been aware of it. On the other hand, the Chinese might be well advised to learn another lesson. The Vietnamese--whether Communist or non-Communist, whether Northerner or Southerner, whether united or disunited--have always sought their own identity and have always resisted Chinese domination no matter how much they may have admired Chinese culture. That these and other lessons were learned imperfectly--by both the Chinese and the Vietnamese--was illustrated poignantly by the events that followed the unification of Viet Nam by Hanoi in 1975.

Interests, Goals, and Strategy

The spring of 1975 ushered in a basic power reorientation throughout Indochina. Communist regimes were ensconced in Cambodia and Laos. US influence in the region was at its nadir, and continuing political disarray in Washington seemed to preclude any American reassertion of power in Southeast Asia for the near term. On the other hand, the Soviet Union appeared to be entering a period of more aggressive involvement in the Third World.

With this new situation, how did Beijing and Hanoi each perceive its own interests and goals, and how much understanding did each exhibit regarding the interests and goals of the other? What policies and strategies did each follow to secure its interests and achieve its goals?

China

Maintaining a secure southern flank was Beijing's first strategic²¹ interest regarding Indochina. With Hanoi's victory in 1975, Beijing became ever more concerned with Soviet influence in the area and accused the Soviets of trying to penetrate the area through massive aid pro-²²grams. The PRC suspected that the USSR was attempting to control all of South Asia and the Indian Ocean by gaining footholds in the two extremities of the vast land mass, viz., in Southwest Asia and in Southeast Asia. Moscow had already secured a position in South Yemen. The Chinese feared that the Soviets would be able to develop the other end of the pincers through a Moscow-Hanoi axis that would first seek hegemony in Indochina and then in all Southeast Asia. The Chinese

leaders seemed willing to accept the fact that Vietnamese nationalism would assert itself rather aggressively at this time and that it would take on an anti-Chinese posture. What the Chinese found unacceptable, however, was the possibility that Viet Nam would collaborate with the Soviet Union to dominate China's southern flank. Vietnamese active²³ hostility toward Cambodia was regarded as particularly ominous.

Beijing feared a power vacuum in Cambodia, which the Soviets and Vietnamese could fill, and the Chinese hoped to develop Cambodia into a buffer between Viet Nam and the rest of Southeast Asia. For this reason the Chinese leadership began to woo the Pol Pot regime, reprehensible²⁴ though it may have appeared to much of the world. To the Chinese, a Soviet consolidation in Southeast Asia would be a significant develop-²⁵ment in its grand strategy of encircling the PRC.

With the fall of South Viet Nam, the Chinese developed a fundamen-²⁶tal strategy to guide its relations with Communist Viet Nam. Beijing decided to use restraint in dealing with Hanoi. The Chinese believed that time was on their side. They were rather confident that the Soviets would become overbearing in Viet Nam and that Hanoi would soon become alienated. They also felt that Viet Nam's pattern of development was more akin to China's than to the Soviet Union's and that, as a result, the Vietnamese would look for guidance more to Beijing than to Moscow. The Beijing leadership planned to bend every effort to avoid becoming involved in Hanoi's disputes with its neighbors. The PRC would work to expand international diplomatic support to bolster its position. This would involve cultivating, especially, Cambodia, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries, Japan, and the United²⁷ States. Finally, the PRC would oppose as strongly as possible any Soviet penetrations into the region.

Viet Nam

In assessing its national interests, Hanoi was guided by three primary considerations: history, ideology, and the immediate threat. 28

China had been Viet Nam's historical enemy, for a period which stretched over two millennia. This engendered a pervasive suspicion within Vietnamese thinking that could not be erased easily.

In terms of ideology, the Vietnamese--contrary to Chinese expectations--perceived a more attractive model in the USSR than in the PRC. The DRV had followed the Maoist pattern of land reform and rural development in the mid-1950s, and the program had proved to be, largely, a failure. By 1960 Hanoi had determined not to follow the PRC paradigm of

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revolution. The war with South Viet Nam and the United States had also influenced Hanoi's thinking. The Vietnamese Communists had seen first hand that modern warfare requires extensive industrial and technological backing, and they had become increasingly disenchanted with the Chinese concept of people's war, which plays down the material element in warfare. Hanoi had nationalistic visions of becoming a great power and wanted to develop its own industrial base. Therefore, the Soviet example of industrialization appealed more to them than the Chinese pattern of rural development. In short, they did not view their revolution as the Chinese thought they would. 30
The Vietnamese were also probably hoping to use the Soviets to keep the Chinese at bay.

Regarding the immediate threat, the Hanoi government saw itself caught between two hostile powers who were in concert, the PRC and the Khmer Rouge's Cambodia. The Vietnamese perceived the PRC's foreign policy to be an extension of the traditional Chinese tributary system.

In fact, the Vietnamese suspected that Mao's Third World theory was a modern manifestation of this traditional Chinese configuration. Hanoi saw China as desiring a malleable Vietnamese hedge state to act as a buffer along China's southern border. Moreover, the Vietnamese Communists considered Beijing to be in league with Washington.³¹

Hanoi developed a strategy aimed at consolidating its still shaky position in Indochina. First, it would develop a modus vivendi with the PRC and Cambodia. Second, the Vietnamese leaders would move quickly to gain primary influence in Laos. Third, Viet Nam would court diplomatic support, especially in the rest of Southeast Asia. Fourth, Hanoi would remain on good terms with the Soviet Union.³²

Perceptions and Misperceptions

Both China and Viet Nam perceived their national security interests to be the most pressing immediate foreign policy problem in dealing with each other in mid-1975. Each saw itself as being encircled by hostile forces. Neither was very perspicacious in considering the position of the other. China did not appear to appreciate the alarm Hanoi would feel over an unfriendly Cambodia. The PRC feared most of all the possibility of significant Soviet influence in Viet Nam. Yet where else was Hanoi to go to secure a powerful patron? The Vietnamese perceived, correctly, China's desire to have buffer states along its southern border; but they did not assess correctly China's extreme sensitivity to its territorial security, especially where the Soviet Union might become involved. Both sides initially planned to play for time, which, according to Holsti, is a sign of good crisis management. Events were soon to start moving faster than either side had anticipated.

A Policy of Caution, 1975-1977

After the North Vietnamese conquest of the South in April 1975, the Chinese adopted a policy of caution and restraint in dealing with the changed situation in Southeast Asia. The PRC had basic strategic goals which it sought to achieve. Beijing wished to establish a configuration of influence in Southeast Asia that would maximize Chinese leadership in the region. The Chinese wanted to thwart any Soviet advances in the area. To accomplish these objectives, the PRC leadership planned to put primary emphasis on diplomatic maneuvers, economic blandishments, and public relations programs. With specific regard to Hanoi, Beijing sought to avoid any confrontation that would exacerbate the Sino-Vietnamese dispute and push the Vietnamese closer to the Soviets.

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Contentious Issues, 1975

In spite of China's desire to limit tensions, a series of contentious issues developed. The most significant of these issues included: (1) different strategic perceptions; (2) attempts by each side to outmaneuver the other; (3) the status of Laos; (4) the dispute over the Spratly and Paracel islands; (5) the conflict over the border between China and Viet Nam; (6) the Overseas Chinese problem; (7) the Sino-Vietnamese rivalry in Southeast Asia; (8) the question of aid; (9) the Cambodian situation; and (10) the role of the Soviet Union in the region. Of these issues, the last was by far the most serious bone of contention; and it played an important part in all of the other problems. The PRC perceived a power vacuum in Southeast Asia due to the collapse of the American effort to sustain the non-Communist regimes in

Indochina. Beijing saw this as ripe for Soviet exploitation and feared
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being flanked on the south by Moscow.

The Chinese began signalling the Vietnamese almost immediately of their concern that Moscow would try to gain advantage in Hanoi at Beijing's expense. On 29 July 1975 an editorial in Ren Min Ri Bao cautioned Hanoi against becoming too close to the Soviets. The editorial used the old adage of allowing the tiger (the USSR) to come in the back door while kicking the wolf (the US) out of the front door. On 3 September 1975 PRC Vice-Premier Chen Xilian, while speaking in Viet Nam, warned Hanoi to guard against becoming a victim of Soviet hegemonism.
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In the fall of 1975, Le Duan, the Secretary-General of the Viet Nam Workers' Party (VWP), made trips to both Beijing and Moscow. These trips were significant because they established the general outline of Hanoi's relations with the Chinese and the Soviets. In September the Vietnamese Secretary-General journeyed to the PRC. There Deng Xiaoping reiterated China's concept of the Third World and asserted that it was in the best interests of Hanoi to align itself with this movement.
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The Chinese had developed the Third World notion to project its leadership among the less developed countries. The Vietnamese for their part saw this as stifling their own foreign policy options, as endangering their relations with the Soviet Union, and as being wholly in the interests of the PRC. In October Le Duan visited Moscow. His meetings with the Soviets were rather more cordial than those with the Chinese. Instead of pressuring him, the Soviets offered him aid, to the amount of three billion dollars over the next five years.
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The question of aid became a very sore point between the Chinese and Vietnamese. In early 1975 Beijing had given Hanoi considerable aid: in support of Hanoi's final offensive against Saigon, and to make up for

the loss of Western supplies to the South with the defeat of the Republic of Viet Nam. China had been supporting North Viet Nam with about \$600 million in gratis aid per year, and Hanoi apparently had counted on receiving this in the future. In August 1975, however, Beijing informed Hanoi that it was reducing its aid package to \$400 million per year and⁴⁰ that it would be in the form of loans. Nor would the PRC sign a long-term economic assistance agreement, which Hanoi had been anticipating.⁴¹ Beijing was signalling Hanoi that it had better behave. Hanoi perceived it as a blackmail maneuver and accused China of adopting a carrot and⁴² stick policy.

The issue of the Overseas Chinese also flared up shortly after Hanoi's victory over the South. Viet Nam had over one million Overseas Chinese, about four-fifths of whom lived in the South.⁴³ Since 1949 Beijing's interest in the Overseas Chinese community in general had waxed and waned depending on assorted factors. As other problems developed between China and Viet Nam, however, the PRC could not afford to overlook actions taken by Hanoi against the Overseas Chinese, for Beijing perceived such actions as a direct affront to the Chinese leadership. For its part Hanoi thought it had good reason to take action against the Chinese living in Viet Nam. The Vietnamese leaders feared that the Overseas Chinese would become a fifth column that would oppose the government. They saw the specter of Malaya and Indonesia. Hanoi was also eager to get at the rich Chinese merchants of the South. Their considerable wealth would certainly be of assistance to the financially strapped Vietnamese treasury. There was an ideological element as well. Hanoi could strike a blow at the Southern "capitalist" structure by neutralizing the Chinese business community.⁴⁴ Additionally,

there were the passions of xenophobia and racism loosed by the successful conquest of the South. Chinese refugees began fleeing South Viet Nam as soon as the Communist military victory appeared imminent. In May of 1975 the Danish ship Clara Maersk rescued about 4,000 Chinese refugees from Viet Nam in the South China Sea. Large numbers of Chinese were fleeing to Hong Kong.⁴⁵ In Saigon anti-Chinese measures commenced with the Communist take-over of the city. The PRC flag was forbidden to be flown.⁴⁶ Shortly before dawn on 11 September 1975, Vietnamese Communist police raided the homes and businesses of large numbers of Overseas Chinese in Saigon and seized their property. Huynh Tan Phat, the Prime Minister of the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG), announced that the Vietnamese were conducting a program to wipe out "compradore capitalists."⁴⁷ This may have been Hanoi's response to Beijing's cut in aid a month earlier. If it was, the Vietnamese were certainly not responding to China's signal as the Chinese would have them. The clamp-down on the Overseas Chinese may also have contributed to Le Duan's cool reception in Beijing later in September. Nevertheless, the Chinese leadership continued to act with restraint. There was no vituperative outpouring against Hanoi as there would be later after similar provocations.

The territorial disputes came into the open during this early post-war period as well. These encompassed two areas: the maritime regions and the land border. There was considerable bickering over ownership of various islands, especially the Paracel and the Spratly groups. There was also argument over territorial waters in the Gulf of Tonkin. These maritime disputes had some merit in and of themselves because the regions in question would appear to offer opportunities for oil exploration. The land border issue, however, was largely a straw man. It

became the symbol of all the other difficulties in Sino-Vietnamese relations, and it developed into the flash point for direct military confrontation. According to the Vietnamese, border flare-ups had begun⁴⁸ to occur as early as 1974. Doubtlessly, both sides sought to use the border clashes as a signal; but these signals proved to be ineffective because each side perceived the border maneuvers of the other as representing⁴⁹ totally inimicable intentions.

Both sides began strategic maneuvers to gain leverage over the other in 1975. Beijing sought to build a broad coalition to support its position in Southeast Asia. It initiated a rapid rapprochement with ASEAN. The Chinese also encouraged Washington not to withdraw precipitously from Asia but to continue to maintain a strong presence,⁵⁰ particularly in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Although Hanoi, too, would soon try to involve the United States and ASEAN in the region, it found this to be extremely irritating in 1975 in the immediate wake of the war. In framing its point of reference, however, Beijing was clear in emphasizing that its main concern was Soviet expansionism. All of its signals stressed this. The Chinese were careful not to be vitriolic in referring to the Vietnamese. Hanoi, though, seemed to be extremely unsolicitous of Chinese views and quite insensitive to Chinese concerns, for the Vietnamese leadership came down openly and enthusiastically on the Soviet side of every issue. Even more alarming to the Chinese were various agreements between Hanoi and Moscow that established a considerable Soviet presence in Viet Nam and gave the Soviets great influence in that country. Following Le Duan's trip to Moscow in October of 1975, Edith Lenart reported in Far Eastern Economic Review:

The Vietnamese . . . support Moscow efforts to diminish China's influence in the Third World and among non-aligned nations. In turn, the Soviets are backing Hanoi's move towards a speedy reunification of Vietnam. For its part, Peking had hoped that the reunification process would be gradual. . . . The latest Soviet aid agreement with Hanoi grants the Vietnamese an undisclosed amount of "credits on easy terms." It calls for the "coordination of the two countries' development plans" and provides for "Soviet specialists to train Vietnamese in Viet Nam in various branches of economy, science, technology and culture." The Soviet Union will "assist in developing Vietnamese industry and agriculture and study the technical and economic aspects of launching several major economic projects in Vietnam."51

That Viet Nam would seek Soviet aid and support is not surprising, and perhaps the Chinese would have tolerated a measure of Soviet-Vietnamese cooperation without becoming overly upset; but Hanoi used its Soviet connection not merely to rebuild the country but also as a weapon to brandish in the face of the Chinese. By the end of 1975, Vietnam's newspapers ran serial panegyrics to the Soviet Union and the Soviet system.

Hanoi's desire to dominate all of Indochina could hardly be disguised. Supported by the Soviets, the Vietnamese resurrected the idea of an Indochina federation in late 1975. Beijing feared the possibility that this might lead to an even stronger power on its southern border and opposed the notion. Having controlled the main faction of the Pathet Lao from its very inception, Hanoi was soon to exercise authority over Laos. With the establishment of the Lao People's Democratic Republic in December 1975, Hanoi's domination of that country was for the most part complete.

The PRC accepted Vietnamese influence in Laos with a certain amount of good grace. Where Beijing was determined to make a stand was with Cambodia. It was a poor choice. China's alliance with the Khmer Rouge's Democratic Kampuchea could do nothing but cause Beijing discomfiture. Supporting the genocidal regime of Pol Pot put China in a very

uncomfortable position; and Communist Cambodia's belligerent intransigence toward Viet Nam was almost certain to lead to war, which would pose China the dilemma of how to respond. Nevertheless, there were several reasons for initial hopes in China that a Cambodian alliance would be appropriate. First, the Khmer Rouge had followed the Maoist model of revolutionary warfare. Second, it had no strong ties with Moscow. It had been bankrolled by the PRC almost exclusively. Third, it flanked Viet Nam to the west and stood athwart Hanoi's path to the rest of Southeast Asia. Fourth, the Khmer Rouge was militantly anti-Vietnamese. This last point was born out by Cambodian attacks against the Vietnamese along the border and in the South China Sea in May and June of 1975.⁵³ Just as the Vietnamese seemed insensitive to Chinese concerns in dealing with the Soviets, the Chinese likewise did not show much appreciation for Vietnamese concerns in dealing with the Cambodians. Khmer Rouge leaders Khieu Samphan and Ieng Sary visited Beijing in August of 1975. They received both a warm welcome and a promise of considerable aid, including military hardware. This was at a time when there were active border hostilities between Cambodia and Viet Nam and at a time when China was reducing its aid to Hanoi.⁵⁴ The Cambodians, for their part, declared complete support for the policies of the PRC.⁵⁵

By the end of 1975, both sides had staked out their positions. Beijing had issued numerous signals to Hanoi warning that the USSR was trying to make Viet Nam a satellite and that good relations with the PRC would depend on how far Hanoi distanced itself from Moscow. In general, Beijing's criticisms of Hanoi were restrained and low-keyed. The Chinese wanted it clear that it was Moscow they feared.

In this they seemed to be in accord with Holsti's principles of good crisis management. Where the Chinese showed rather less skill was in their quick reduction of aid to Hanoi and in their unqualified support of Cambodia. Had they used a bit more carrot than stick in these early signals, they may have been more successful in deferring Hanoi from taking actions they deemed unacceptable. The Vietnamese seemed to react positively to none of the Chinese signals. Almost immediately Hanoi developed closer relations with Moscow in an effort to deter Chinese influence in Southeast Asia and to ensconce Vietnamese power throughout Indochina.

Contention Continues, 1976-1977

The years 1976 and 1977 saw a continuation of the patterns established in 1975; yet crisis management seemed to be working. There was a definite easing of tensions in 1976. This was due to some extent at least to the fact that the parties concerned were preoccupied with internal problems. The PRC witnessed the deaths of Zhou Enlai and Mao Zedong, the fall from grace for the second time of Deng Xiaoping, and the purge of the Gang of Four. Hanoi was busy solidifying Northern control over the South and commencing post-war reconstruction. Even the Khmer Rouge were in a quiescent period in their foreign relations.

During 1976 Hanoi hoped to develop a reasonably independent foreign policy by improving relations with China and the West and by holding the Soviets at a bit of a distance. Both Chinese and Vietnamese press coverage of the other became more cordial. Economic and educational delegations once more were exchanged.

Chinese signals to Viet Nam at this time were generally positive. On 2 July 1976, Viet Nam was officially reunified and the Socialist

Republic of Viet Nam (SRV) declared. Although Beijing had hoped that an independent Communist regime might survive in South Viet Nam for some time, the Chinese leadership sent several messages of good will to Hanoi with the reunification.⁵⁷ Moreover, the Vietnamese seemed to be responding positively for a change. On 1 July 1976 Hanoi published a rather warm message of congratulations on the occasion of the fifty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the CCP.⁵⁸ On 10 September 1976, the Vietnamese sent condolences to Beijing on the death of Mao Zedong.⁵⁹ Their message stressed Sino-Vietnamese friendship. Furthermore, the Vietnamese were of considerable assistance to the Chinese in the embalming of Mao's body and in the construction of his mausoleum.⁶⁰

While tensions had been relaxed in 1976, the contentious issues remained. The PRC continued to reduce its aid to Hanoi. By the end of 1976, military assistance had been curtailed sharply, and virtually all grants had been replaced by loans.⁶¹ Part of this perceived parsimony was the result of China's desire to invest its limited resources more intensively in its own modernization program. Clashes along the Sino-Vietnamese border apparently continued to break out during 1976, but it is instructive that neither side made much of these.⁶²

Relatively cordial relations were to prevail throughout much of 1977. On 10 January 1977, a long article in Ren Min Ri Bao recalled the days of Sino-Vietnamese friendship and Zhou Enlai's special affection for Viet Nam.⁶³ Further positive signals were to follow. The Chinese were particularly pleased by what appeared to be a deterioration in Soviet-Vietnamese relations at the time. The Vietnamese had been expressing their discontent with the amount of Soviet aid and with Soviet

high-handedness. The Chinese responded by encouraging Hanoi. On 19 March 1977 the PRC and the SRV concluded a trade agreement.⁶⁵ Hanoi also made moves to improve relations with Washington. A commission under Leonard Woodcock visited the SRV in March of 1977, but normalization of US-SRV relations bogged down over Hanoi's insistence that Washington pay huge reparations as a precondition.⁶⁶ Beijing may have had mixed feelings about an American-Vietnamese rapprochement. On the one hand, the PRC wanted the United States to play an active role in Southeast Asia to counter the Soviets. On the other hand, Beijing would probably have been displeased if the United States had recognized the SRV before it had recognized the PRC.

The major impediment to the development of closer ties between Hanoi and Beijing in 1977 was the rekindling of the Cambodian war. Fighting began along the border in April and intensified as the year went on. The PRC had armed and supported the Khmer Rouge regime, which angered the Vietnamese. The Cambodians had increased their military strength from six to eleven divisions since 1975.⁶⁷

During October of 1977 Soviet-Vietnamese relations began to improve once more. At least eight highranking delegations from the Soviet Union visited the SRV in October. This represented a reaffirmation of Soviet-Vietnamese cooperation across a broad front. Hanoi responded with a "learn from the Soviet Union" campaign, accompanied by the usual series of fulsome news editorials in the major papers and journals. The SRV moved closer to the USSR for several reasons. Hanoi was in financial difficulties. The Vietnamese Communists' attempt to extort reparation payments from the United States had failed, and the PRC showed no sign of becoming more generous with aid. In these circumstances, Soviet economic support became ever more critical. The growing war with

Cambodia was putting a severe strain on the Vietnamese. Moscow was the only reliable source of the war materiel that Hanoi required. Hanoi was probably signalling Beijing of its extreme displeasure with Chinese support for the Khmer Rouge.⁶⁸

The Chinese responded to Hanoi's position with restraint. Perhaps, there was a genuine effort made by the Chinese leaders to understand Viet Nam's perceptions of its interests in Indochina. At the behest of the Chinese, Le Duan visited Beijing from 20 November to 25 November 1977. While the meeting was not unfriendly, it had to contend with some of the most bitter fighting to date along the Vietnamese-Cambodian border. Yet the crisis between Hanoi and Beijing remained under control.

At the end of 1977, China could look with some satisfaction on the status of its foreign policy. A considerable amount of cooperation was evident among the United States, ASEAN, Japan, and the PRC. Outside of Indochina, the Soviets had made few inroads in Southeast Asia. With regard to Hanoi, Beijing had been reasonably skillful in managing the crisis. The Chinese had signalled their feelings to the Vietnamese but in a restrained manner. They had used positive as well as negative signals. They had not rushed the pace of critical events. Often they had exhibited signs attempting to understand Hanoi's frame of reference. All of these things are part of what Ole Holsti would consider good crisis management. Beijing also had made a grievous error. By aligning itself so closely and definitively with Cambodia, it had surrendered much initiative and had put itself in a most dangerous position, indeed. This was akin to the 1914 case in Europe. Here the Chinese directly violated Holsti's admonition that decision-makers maintain control.⁶⁹

Contention Becomes Crisis, 1978-1979

The year of 1978 saw the breakdown of effective crisis management of the Sino-Vietnamese dispute. The contentious issues that irritated relations between Hanoi and Beijing would boil up and eventually lead to war. This study examines the rise of the crisis in seven stages from January 1978 to February 1979.

Emerging Crisis, January to Late February 1978

Throughout the month of January 1978 the border war between Cambodia and Viet Nam raged with a new intensity. On 31 December 1977, Phnom Penh had broken diplomatic relations with Hanoi; and Hanoi perceived China, in collusion with the United States and Cambodia, to be doing everything it could to keep Viet Nam from becoming a strong regional power. On the other hand, the Chinese believed that the Vietnamese were plotting with the Soviets to gain hegemony over first Indochina, then
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over all Southeast Asia.

Neither the PRC nor the SRV had abandoned positive crisis management completely, however. In response to a complaint from Hanoi that the PRC press was one-sided in reporting the war, Ren Min Ri Bao published accounts from both the Vietnamese and Cambodian perspectives on
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10 January 1978. After a massive, two-month push into Cambodia, the Vietnamese announced a peace plan on 5 February 1978. It called for a cease-fire, a mutual troop pull-back from the border, and a negotiated
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settlement. Neither Phnom Penh nor Beijing responded.

Heightening Crisis, Late
February to Late May, 1978

Toward the end of February, Sino-Vietnamese relations began a precipitous decline. Several of the contentious issues now came to a new head. Cambodian attacks had continued unabated since Hanoi's 5 February peace offer. On 21 February 1978, Radio Hanoi accused the PRC of giving massive military aid to Cambodia and of encouraging the Khmer Rouge to continue military operations against the SRV. To underline their concern, they pointed out the large number of casualties they were taking.⁷³ The Chinese responded presently. At the Fifth National People's Congress, held in Beijing from 28 February to 5 March 1978, Hua Guofeng declared that "no country should seek hegemony in any region or impose its will on others."⁷⁴ By this time "hegemony" had become a code word associated as much with the SRV as with the USSR. On 5 March Beijing sent a technical mission to Cambodia. The Chinese praised the Cambodians for opposing "enemies of all categories."⁷⁵ Beijing was clearly signalling Hanoi to keep its hands off Cambodia. Shortly thereafter, the Cambodians launched a sharp attack around the Vietnamese border city of Ha Tien.⁷⁶ Such hit-and-run assaults by the Cambodians⁷⁷ were to continue throughout the spring.

A second area where tensions once again mounted rapidly was that of the Overseas Chinese. By the beginning of 1978, the PRC was hoping to mobilize Overseas Chinese capital, connections, and expertise to support the Four Modernizations. In January of 1978 a special conference on the Overseas Chinese was held in Beijing. The Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission was once again set up at ministerial level, and proposed a⁷⁸ program of cooperation between the Overseas Chinese and the PRC.

Ren Min Ri Bao declared Beijing's heightened interest in the Overseas Chinese in an article on 4 January 1978.⁷⁹ To the extent that this article was a signal to Hanoi, the PRC probably meant it to be nothing more than a warning that Beijing was interested in proper treatment for the ethnic Chinese in Viet Nam; but Hanoi could easily interpret this as an impingement on Viet Nam's sovereignty, both politically and economically. At any rate, again the Chinese failed to deter the Vietnamese from taking a course of action of which Beijing disapproved. On 24 March 1978, the SRV's security police began massive raids on Chinese businesses in Cholon. The police closed more than 30,000 Chinese business establishments.⁸⁰ Chinese merchants in Hanoi also began to suffer increased limitations on their business activities.⁸¹ In early May reports from Viet Nam indicated that there had been bloody clashes between the security police and the Overseas Chinese and that many Chinese had been killed.⁸² The first wave of the great exodus of Chinese from Viet Nam occurred in April and May of 1978. Almost 100,000 ethnic Chinese fled North Viet Nam across the land border into China. Beijing perceived Hanoi's persecution of the Overseas Chinese to be primarily anti-Chinese rather than anti-free enterprise.⁸³

The flaring up of the Overseas Chinese problem exacerbated two other contentious issues. With large numbers of Chinese crossing from Viet Nam into China by land, Sino-Vietnamese border tensions rose. The border regions became more militarized, and the number of incidents began to increase.⁸⁴ On 12 May the Foreign Ministry of the PRC informed Hanoi that it was curtailing significant amounts of economic aid to the SRV. Beijing was signalling Hanoi to desist in its anti-Overseas Chinese policy because the Foreign Ministry's note asserted that the aid earmarked for Hanoi would now be used to assist the refugees.⁸⁵

In early May the Chinese began to signal their rising concern over the increasing Soviet presence in Viet Nam. This was done through a series of articles in the pro-PRC Hong Kong newspaper Wen Wei Pao. On 11 May 1978, Wen Wei Pao asserted that the Soviets had established a permanent, large-scale presence in the SRV. The article maintained that⁸⁶ there were Soviet advisors throughout the country. On 22 May an article appeared in Wen Wei Pao describing the Overseas Chinese crisis as the Chinese Communists perceived it. First, it reiterated the perception that Hanoi's persecution of the ethnic Chinese in Viet Nam was an anti-PRC action, designed to inflame Sino-Vietnamese relations. Second, it saw the black hand of the Soviet Union stirring up the difficulties. Wen Wei Pao accused the Soviets of trying to subjugate Viet Nam and of working to poison the already disturbed atmosphere⁸⁷ between Hanoi and Beijing.

As the crisis heightened, the signalling became more negative, more intense, and more rapid. Holsti points to this as an indicator that the⁸⁸ participants are feeling themselves to be under greater stress. Nevertheless, both sides were still behaving with some circumspection. Each side tended to be oblique in its criticisms of the other. The level of vitriol in the rhetoric was kept reasonably low. Beijing issued some of its stronger signals not through the official PRC/CCP organs but rather through the pro-Beijing press in Hong Kong.

Crossing a Critical Threshold,
Late May and Early June 1978

The Sino-Vietnamese dispute seemed to reach a critical turning point on 24 May 1978. On that day the Khmer Rouge launched a vicious counterattack against pro-Hanoi Khmer troops in eastern Cambodia and routed them.⁸⁹ The Vietnamese had hoped to avoid escalating their direct intervention in Cambodia by building a native Khmer resistance movement, and now this resistance movement had been dealt a crippling blow. On the same day, Beijing fired a propaganda broadside at the SRV. Gone were rhetorical restraint and indirect attack. The PRC issued a statement of accusations through its official news agency directly against Hanoi. According to Beijing, Hanoi was guilty of heinous persecutions of the Chinese in Viet Nam. The PRC asserted that it had tried its best to dissuade the SRV through friendly blandishments but that Hanoi had disregarded all positive signals.⁹⁰ The SRV rejected all of these charges the following day.⁹¹ Nevertheless, the Chinese leaders continued their attack on the Vietnamese. On 26 May they announced that they would send ships to Viet Nam to rescue the Overseas Chinese.⁹² At this point the Vietnamese attempted to calm the situation by accepting the Chinese offer to send ships to evacuate ethnic Chinese from the SRV and by calling for negotiations to discuss the issues. Beijing, however, rejected negotiations at that time.⁹³ The PRC made accusations against the SRV subsequently on 29 May, 30 May, 2 June, 5 June, and 7 June 1978.⁹⁴

As always, the Chinese were particularly apprehensive about the Soviet position in Viet Nam. A 30 May article in Wen Wei Pao blamed Moscow for the persecutions of the Overseas Chinese. The Soviets were

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accused of making a systematic attempt to surround the PRC. Reports
were circulated in Hong Kong on 4 June that the Soviets had constructed
a missile complex not far from Hanoi in the vicinity of Hon Gay and that
the Soviets were supporting the 308th Division of the People's Army of
Viet Nam (PAVN), a unit stationed along the China border.⁹⁶ On 5 June,
Deng Xiaoping briefed the Japan Broadcasting Corporation on the status
of the crisis. He said that China had reduced its economic aid to the
SRV and that it was prepared to take more drastic measures if the
Vietnamese continued to harass the Overseas Chinese. He hinted that the
Soviets were behind Hanoi's hostile actions, and he revealed that the
Vietnamese had never been very friendly toward the PRC, even during the
during the times when China was supplying Hanoi with huge amounts of
aid.⁹⁷ Another spate of reports were circulated in Hong Kong on 7 June;
these asserted that the Soviets had been using the former American base
at Cam Ranh Bay.⁹⁸

Why did the PRC undertake a quantum escalation of its signals--in
volume, in intensity, and in negativity--at this time? Beijing felt
itself under considerably increased stress in three major areas.

The first matter was that of the Overseas Chinese. For Beijing,
Hanoi's maltreatment of its ethnic Chinese population amounted to
nothing less than a highly visible, public slap in the face of the PRC.
The Chinese leadership perceived several elements in Hanoi's campaign.
First, it was instigated by the Soviet Union to alienate Hanoi from
Beijing so that Moscow could become the sole patron of the SRV. This
would enable the Soviets both to gain greater influence in Viet Nam and
to flank China to the south. Second, Hanoi was trying to inflame hatred
for and suspicion of China throughout the countries of Southeast Asia,
all of whom had large Overseas Chinese minorities. This would open the

door for Viet Nam to dominate the region. Third, the combination of the first two points cast the SRV in the role of "the Cuba of Asia." Just as Moscow and Havana were in collaboration to dominate Latin America and flank the United States, so too were Moscow and Hanoi in collusion to dominate Southeast Asia and flank China.

The second matter was that of Cambodia. Viet Nam was now openly and brazenly trying to subvert a government allied to China. Again, the PRC leaders perceived this as a slap in the face of China.

The third matter was that of the ever increasing physical presence of the Soviet Union in the SRV. There now was the real danger of a significant superpower military occupation on China's southern border. Beijing perceived an insidious Soviet strategy. Moscow would encourage Vietnamese xenophobia so that Hanoi would become isolated from the international community and would get bogged down in hostilities with its neighbors. Internally, the Vietnamese economy would be in a shambles, while, externally, Viet Nam would be engaged in protracted brush-fire wars. This would make Hanoi doubly dependent on Moscow. Viet Nam would require aid both to prop up its domestic economy and to pursue its imperialist wars; and, since no other country would support Viet Nam, it could turn only to Moscow.

At this time the Chinese would appear to have acted in a manner that Holsti describes as decision-making under stress. The PRC decision-makers felt that China's national interests had been challenged and that they would lose face or credibility if they did not counter rapidly. They felt their range of options to be shrinking. They responded with a series of signals of increased volume and intensity to
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deter Hanoi from continuing along an unacceptable course.

Escalating Attacks, Mid June
to Mid July 1978

Beijing launched its second major barrage against Hanoi on 9 June. The Foreign Ministry of the PRC accused the SRV of lying about its persecution of the Overseas Chinese, of misrepresenting China's objectives in Cambodia, and of stirring up animosity against China. Hanoi was condemned for its barbarous treatment of ethnic Chinese in Viet Nam. On the other hand, the Chinese had not yet abandoned all positive approaches. The Foreign Ministry also called for talks with the Vietnamese¹⁰² to try to settle some of the problems of the Overseas Chinese. Low-level meetings were, in fact, convened on 13 June 1978, but broke down¹⁰³ soon without accomplishing anything.

June and July of 1978 were characterized by charges and counter-charges, by bitter recriminations on both sides. The Chinese were no longer oblique in expressing their concerns. After the assault of 9 June 1978, the Chinese issued significant warnings to Hanoi on 17 June,¹⁰⁴ 21 June, 12 July, and 17 July. The Vietnamese responded with a propaganda volley of their own, beginning on 20 June. The central theme was that of Khmer Rouge genocide with the implication that the Chinese¹⁰⁵ were involved.

In addition to the growing war of words, more tangible developments were occurring. Sporadic exchanges of fire began along the Sino-Vietnamese border at least as early as 27 June.¹⁰⁶ On 3 July Beijing cut off all Chinese aid to the SRV.¹⁰⁷ Most significant was the SRV's joining the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA, COMECON) in¹⁰⁸ late June of 1978. This was an especially revolting development for the Chinese. It represented a triumph for Moscow, for it bound Hanoi

formally into the East European Communist planning structure. Henceforth, Hanoi's economic plans would have to be coordinated with and approved by the Soviets. As for the SRV, regular aid and trade was now assured, giving Hanoi a freer hand in pursuing its foreign policy objectives in the region.¹⁰⁸

It is instructive to examine how Hanoi was reacting to the pressures that were building up. How were the Vietnamese responding to the Chinese signals? During June 1978 the Politburo of the Viet Nam Communist Party (VCP)¹⁰⁹ developed a strategy to cope with the crisis. First, the PRC was confirmed as Viet Nam's number-one enemy. Hanoi perceived China's objective to be the domination of all Southeast Asia. Second, the SRV leaders perceived Cambodia to be China's cat's paw in Southeast Asia and decided that the Cambodian threat to SRV interests had become so great that direct Vietnamese military action should be taken to topple the Khmer Rouge regime. Third, the decision was made to orient the SRV economy for a new war and to defer domestic reconstruction until the international crisis had subsided. Fourth, to accomplish this it would be necessary to get full Soviet backing. Fifth, at the same time, Hanoi would pursue an offensive to broaden its international political support. Central to this effort would be a campaign to improve relations with the United States and ASEAN.¹¹⁰

The events of June and July 1978 show that the PRC's effort to deter the SRV from taking further actions that Beijing considered threatening to Chinese interests had not been very successful. Hanoi had not reacted to China's signals in the way that the PRC leaders had hoped they would. Instead of perceiving China's alarm with Soviet expansionism in Southeast Asia and China's concern with loss of face due to the mistreatment of Overseas Chinese in Viet Nam and the threatened

overthrow of an allied government in Cambodia, Hanoi interpreted Beijing's signals as indicators that the PRC was advancing the traditional Chinese objective of turning Southeast Asia into a tributary region. In short, Hanoi perceived Beijing to be working directly against Vietnamese interests. The leaders in Hanoi also can be seen to be reacting in the fashion described by Holsti as decision-making under stress. They saw the need for quick action. They perceived their alternatives as becoming ever fewer in number. They became convinced that more drastic action was required. Their communications were increasingly vituperative. They surrendered much of their own freedom of action by entangling themselves further with an outside power, viz. the Soviet Union.

Contending and Negotiating,
Mid July to October 1978

On 19 July 1978, the Foreign Ministry of the PRC called upon the SRV to enter into negotiations at the vice-ministerial level.¹¹¹ Three days later Hanoi accepted. It appeared that both sides were willing to make one more effort at reconciliation.

The delegations met in Hanoi on 8 August 1978. Initially, the Vietnamese seemed to be in a more cordial mood than the Chinese. In its opening remarks, the SRV delegation called for a renewal of the friendship between China and Viet Nam. The Chinese negotiating team also pleaded for Sino-Vietnamese friendship but then launched into an attack against the SRV for its shabby treatment of Viet Nam's ethnic Chinese.¹¹² On 19 August, at the third session of the talks, the main issue of the negotiations was addressed, the problem of the Chinese residents in the SRV. Beijing's delegation presented a four-point

program to solve the problem. First, the SRV should stop persecuting the Chinese and safeguard their rights and interests. Second, Hanoi should not pressure the Chinese in Viet Nam to accept Vietnamese citizenship. Third, the Vietnamese should make every effort to return displaced Chinese in Viet Nam to their original homes without discrimination. Beijing wanted particularly those Chinese who were camped along the PRC-SRV border to go back to their homes. Fourth, Hanoi should accept back those Chinese who had fled Viet Nam but who wanted to be repatriated. The Vietnamese should resettle these people without taking any retributive actions against them. The Chinese were clearly indicating the strains that these refugees--now numbering about 113 200,000--were placing on PRC resources. The Vietnamese negotiators rejected these Chinese demands. They were especially incensed by the proposition that they repatriate those Chinese who had already left 114 their homes. Hanoi felt that it, too, was suffering an economic burden brought on by the refugee situation.

After another session of fruitless talks, the Chinese signalled their dissatisfaction by recalling their chief negotiator, Zhong Xidong, 115 for consultations on 28 August. On 12 September the Chinese in a rather more conciliatory tone urged the Vietnamese to settle the Overseas Chinese problem through the application of China's four-point program. The PRC delegation wanted the SRV, at least as a start, to 116 guarantee the rights of those Chinese still resident in Viet Nam. When the Vietnamese temporized, the Chinese became more adamant. Two more sessions were held--on 19 September and on 26 September--but the opportunity appeared to have been lost. These last two meetings were marked by bitter accusations rather than by any constructive

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dialogue. After the 26 September session, the Chinese delegation
left Hanoi. Beijing blamed Hanoi for the failure of the talks and
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accused the SRV of negotiating in bad faith.

Altogether there were eight official sessions in the Sino-
Vietnamese talks, stretching from 8 August to 26 September 1978. There
was no genuine negotiation, and the failure of the talks served only to
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inflame the contentious issues further.

In October there was another attempt to ease tensions, and it came
from a rather unexpected source, the Khmer Rouge. By now the Cambodian
government feared that the Vietnamese intended to initiate large-scale
military operations against it. Consequently, the Pol Pot regime sought
to mend its fences with Viet Nam and to improve its international image.
The Cambodian government offered to enter into a non-aggression pact
with the SRV. The Khmer Rouge invited outside observers into Cambodia
to show the world that the charges of genocide had been exaggerated.
The Cambodians also resurrected Prince Sihanouk, who began appearing at
official functions. Hanoi was far from pleased with this new moderation
emanating from Phnom Penh. The Vietnamese leaders were counting on the
horrendous record of the Khmer Rouge to justify their overthrow of the
Pol Pot regime. Ironically, the Khmer Rouge good-will offensive probab-
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ly hastened Hanoi's invasion of Cambodia.

While talks were going on in Hanoi, problems with the contentious
issues between the SRV and the PRC continued unabated. Chinese refugees
continued to flee Viet Nam. The Vietnamese-Cambodian border conflict
raged on. Soviet influence in Hanoi increased rather than decreased.
Incidents along the PRC-SRV border became an almost daily affair, now
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with incursions by each side into the territory of the other.

14 September 1978. This was two days after the failure of the sixth session of the Sino-Vietnamese talks. At that meeting the Chinese had tried to be as moderate as they felt they could, but the Vietnamese had not responded favorably. The 14 September broadside accused the SRV of being systematically anti-Chinese and anti-Cambodian. Beijing maintained that Hanoi was lying in its assertions that the PRC was using the Overseas Chinese as some sort of fifth column. The PRC blamed the Soviet Union for stirring up all this trouble.¹²² On the same day the Chinese conducted a raid across the border into Viet Nam.¹²³

Both sides scrambled for foreign support. In July 1978 the Vietnamese began a campaign to woo the United States. Hanoi dropped its demand for reconstruction aid and offered to assist the United States search for the remains of its missing in action. The SRV even sought to attract American business interests with promises of lucrative deals.¹²⁴ Beijing, however, held all of the aces with regard to the American connection. The consummation of diplomatic relations with the PRC was Washington's primary goal in Asia at that time.¹²⁵ ASEAN also became a prime target for improved relations. Here too the PRC was able to outdistance the SRV.¹²⁶ China's biggest foreign policy success of the summer of 1978 was the treaty of peace and friendship it concluded with Japan. The treaty was signed on 12 August, and the instruments of ratification were exchanged on 22 October 1978. Of particular interest was the inclusion in the treaty of the anti-hegemony clause directed against the Soviet Union.

The period of the late summer and early fall of 1978 was marked by the not untypical tactic in modern international relations of simultaneous negotiating and fighting. The Sino-Vietnamese talks did not

produce any type of give and take, any sort of compromise or flexibility that characterizes successful negotiations. The negotiators on each side appeared to be impervious to any awareness of the other side's frame of reference and limitations of action. Nor did the negotiations seem to slow down the pace of critical events. The fact that the talks were aborted after less than two months of negotiating indicates the pressure of time that was perceived. The intransigence of both sides revealed their feeling that their options had been severely restricted. Their exchanges at the sessions became increasingly stereotyped and hostile. They were experiencing the difficulties of decision-making under stress as charted by Holsti.

Edging toward the Precipice,
November and December, 1978

By the end of October 1978, the situation between Hanoi and Beijing was extremely tense. Nevertheless, even at this point, it still could have been stabilized. Hanoi, however, took two steps before the year's end that had an extremely disequilibrating effect.

The first great shock was the signing of the USSR-SRV Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation on 3 November 1978. Hanoi's top leaders journeyed to Moscow to affix their signatures to the treaty. Anti-PRC speeches were delivered in the capital of the USSR by both the Vietnamese and the Soviets. The treaty had a clear anti-Chinese tone in virtually every respect: political, economic, ideological. Viet Nam appeared now to be inextricably in Moscow's camp. Beijing had been dealt, quite brazenly, both the insult and the injury. ¹²⁷ Immediately following the treaty, Chinese signals to Viet Nam took on a much more threatening tone.

On 10 November, Ren Min Ri Bao published an editorial condemning Soviet-Vietnamese collusion in perpetrating various border incidents. It warned that the "Chinese people are determined to safeguard their sovereignty and territorial integrity and will never allow the recurrence of such incidents. We do not want an inch of another country's territory, and we do not allow any country to occupy an inch of our territory."¹²⁸

On 13 December Vice Premier Li Xiannian asserted that "China's forbearance has its limits and the Vietnamese authorities are deluding themselves by thinking that we are weak and can be bullied."¹²⁹

On 24 December Ren Min Ri Bao published an editorial that accused the SRV of making attacks on Chinese territory with the support of the Soviet Union. The editorial warned that the PRC "will not attack unless it is attacked. But if it is attacked, it will certainly counterattack."¹³⁰

That the Vietnamese were taking little cognizance of these signals was made evident by the second great shock. On 25 December 1978, the Vietnamese army invaded Cambodia with the intention of conquering the country. By 7 January 1979, Phnom Penh had fallen. On 8 January a People's Revolutionary Committee under Heng Samrin was set up as the new government of Cambodia. On 9 January Vietnamese troops launched an offensive in western Cambodia to complete their conquest of the whole country.¹³¹

Beijing now perceived the worst-case scenario as having come to pass: China had been flanked to the south by the Soviets, and the SRV had taken control of all Indochina. The PRC had been ignominiously insulted in Moscow, and its interests and credibility had been openly challenged in Southeast Asia. The Chinese leadership had signalled

Hanoi repeatedly during November and December, especially emphasizing their concern about the Soviet danger; but this had failed to deter the Vietnamese.

Preparing for War, January to
Mid February 1979

On 31 December 1978 Beijing recalled its ambassador to the SRV from
132 Hanoi. On 4 January 1979, the Chinese accused the Vietnamese of
"frenzied provocations."¹³³ In addition to the two shocks of November and December, the Sino-Vietnamese border had continued to roil relations, with incidents now occurring daily; and the Overseas Chinese problem showed no signs of abating. By this time the PRC was seriously contemplating war.

The PRC had managed a number of diplomatic successes throughout the world in 1978, indeed, far more than the SRV. Chief among these successes were the treaty with Japan in August, the increased good will toward China generated in ASEAN and Europe, and the approach of formal diplomatic relations with the United States to be instituted on 1 January 1979. Now was the time to turn some of these successes to immediate advantage, or so thought some in Beijing. The PRC leadership was particularly interested in securing the support of the United States and Japan in its dispute with the SRV.

Deng Xiaoping made his "triumphal tour" of the United States from 28 January to 4 February 1979. While in America he issued several warnings to Hanoi. He hoped to project at least the image of US support for his signals to the Vietnamese, who at this time were also still hoping to win some sympathy from Washington.

On 30 January 1979, Deng asserted, "We need to act appropriately, we cannot allow Vietnam to run wild everywhere. In the interest of world peace and stability and in the interest of our own country, we may be forced to do what we do not like to do."¹³³

Later that day Deng maintained that "China would not hesitate to shoulder the necessary sacrifices to uphold international justice and the long-term interests of world peace and stability."¹³⁴

On 31 January Deng issued his most celebrated of warnings: "If we don't teach them some necessary lessons, it just won't do. . . . I can tell you that what the Chinese people say counts. . . . Any action taken by the Chinese is through careful consideration. We will not take any rash action. As to what measures we will adopt, we are still studying the problem."¹³⁵

On his return from the United States, Deng Xiaoping made a brief stop-over visit to Japan (6-8 February 1979). On 7 February Deng again asserted that "Vietnam must be punished for its expansionist action against Cambodia . . . action which has been instigated by the Soviet Union."¹³⁶

Deng had put Tokyo and Washington in an uncomfortable position. Both were extraordinarily eager for good relations with the PRC; and, therefore, neither wanted to do anything to antagonize the Chinese. Deng played this to the hilt. In August 1978 he had been successful in getting the Japanese to accept the anti-hegemony clause in the Japan-PRC treaty. Now, he followed with anti-Hanoi signals from the United States and Japan. Neither Washington nor Tokyo supported the proposition of a Chinese punitive expedition against Viet Nam; but, on the other hand, both felt it necessary to take great pains to be very delicate in expressing their opposition to the Chinese leadership. Hanoi, too, had

been making overtures to Tokyo and Washington toward the end of 1978, and Deng hoped that the appearance that Japan and the United States were backing the PRC would cause the Vietnamese to take a more moderate course. It did not.

Throughout January and into February, the PRC moved large numbers
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of troops to the border region. According to Agence France Presse, on 8 February, immediately following Deng's return from the United States and Japan, the Chinese decided to go to war with the SRV. A unified command under the leadership of General Xi Shiyou (Commander), General Yang Dezhi (Deputy Commander), and General Zhang Dingfa (Chief
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of Staff) was established. In concert with this, Li Xiannian issued one more verbal warning to the Vietnamese to heed all of the previous
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signals that the Chinese had sent.

Although the Chinese were signalling that the eleventh hour was at hand, the Vietnamese doubted that Beijing would actually launch a large-scale military attack against the SRV. First, the Vietnamese counted on their treaty with the Soviets to deter the Chinese. Second, the conquest of Cambodia was already a fait accompli. A Chinese attack would not be of any military assistance now to the Khmer Rouge. Third, Hanoi knew that the primary concern of the PRC was its Four Modernizations. The SRV leaders doubted that China would risk setting back its economic programs by entering a costly war. Fourth, Hanoi was well aware of the debilitating effect that the Cultural Revolution had had on the Chinese military establishment. The SRV leaders doubted that the Chinese would throw the PLA against a technologically superior and greatly more experienced Vietnamese armed force before the PLA had been modernized. Fifth, although Hanoi railed against a Beijing-Tokyo-Washington axis,

the Vietnamese leaders knew that China had no serious outside support
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for pursuing a war against the SRV. Based on reasoning such as this,
Hanoi felt no compulsion to make significant positive gestures to
Beijing.

Once again the Vietnamese had miscalculated. Once again they had
failed to take into account Beijing's frame of reference. Once again
they had not heeded China's signals. Above all else the PRC feared that
the USSR was gaining a significant geopolitical advantage to China's
south through the actions of the SRV. This could not go unanswered, and
Beijing had signalled this concern to Hanoi repeatedly. Not only did
Hanoi not respond positively to Beijing's signals, it challenged the PRC
openly by persecuting its ethnic Chinese and by making bellicose state-
ments in Moscow.

China, on its side, also had made serious miscalculations. Its
principal one was to tie itself to the odious and aggressive Khmer Rouge
regime, which presented a genuine threat to the SRV's national
interests. Beijing had also underestimated Hanoi's determination to
keep the PRC out of Vietnamese affairs. The Chinese leaders did not
seem to realize fully that Viet Nam had virtually no allies and that it
would almost have to rely on the Soviet Union.

The tinder-box PRC-SRV border situation presented both a pretext
and a flash point for active military action. On 17 February 1979, the
PLA invaded Viet Nam. The nature of the resulting war from Beijing's
perspective was limited and punitive and, as such, was a continuation of
China's crisis management, not an aberration from it.

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Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

The Decision to Go to War

Why did China finally go to war with Viet Nam ? A number of conditions prevailed that impelled the Chinese leaders to take the steps which led to the invasion of the SRV in February of 1979. First, Beijing felt its security interests were being seriously and immediately threatened and a more passive reaction would only heighten the threat. Generally underlining this was a history of Chinese concern over the security of its southern realms, which had contributed to a long record of animosity between the Chinese and the Vietnamese. Second, Hanoi had openly challenged Beijing's "face" and credibility by its persecution of the ethnic Chinese in Viet Nam, by its delivery of anti-Chinese speeches in Moscow, by its pressure on the southern border of the PRC, and by its invasion of Cambodia. Third, the presence of a hostile superpower, the Soviet Union, on the scene raised the stakes considerably. China did not view Viet Nam merely as an obstreperous regional power, but rather perceived it as part of a global Soviet maneuver to achieve a strategic encirclement of the PRC. The Chinese leadership felt obliged to react to this set of circumstances with a limited war on Viet Nam.

The Relevance of History

The first conclusion that can be drawn is that prior historical experience is relevant to subsequent developments. This is not to assert determinism, but rather to affirm that the patterns of the past may give a clue to understanding the patterns of the present and future. While the Sino-Vietnamese dispute may have seemed aberrant to the contemporary observer, from an historical perspective, it certainly was not. China's strategic objective in the region has been to secure its southern realms--historically and currently. Viet Nam's strategic objective has been to dominate the Indochina area and to establish its independent identity in the face of its culturally overwhelming neighbor. Viet Nam also has been concerned with security, with regard to both China and Cambodia. This, too, has been an historical as well as contemporary phenomenon. These objectives of China and of Viet Nam have clashed for two millennia. That they should do so again in the late 1970s is not surprising. Since the nineteenth century, the element of a powerful third-party presence in Viet Nam has served to intensify China's concern. France, Japan, and the United States have all been intimately involved in Viet Nam during the past two hundred years; and, although the nature of each one's involvement differed considerably from that of the others, China opposed them all alike. It was, therefore, hardly extraordinary that the PRC should become quite alarmed at the Soviet involvement in the 1970s.

The Perceptions of Deterrence

While, in many respects, China's reaction to the events of the late 1970s was similar to its handling of the Korean and Indian emergencies as described by Allen Whiting, there were important variations as well. In some measure the PRC had refined its policy of deterrence into a broader policy of crisis management. Beijing still believed that foreign powers would conspire to gain an advantage over China, and the Chinese leaders were still convinced of the importance of timing in delivering their signals. On the other hand, the Chinese appeared to be less impelled to assume a belligerent posture, and they seemed to be willing to consider a wider range of options than before in order to achieve their objectives. This was especially the case in the earlier stages of the crisis.

From 1975 to mid-1978, the PRC exercised moderation in dealing with Viet Nam. The Chinese seemed willing to try to understand Hanoi's frame of reference. They even seemed to be willing to accept the fact that the Vietnamese were bound to exhibit a measure of hostility toward China. Beijing's overriding goal was to preclude the spread of Soviet influence in the area. To achieve this the Chinese attempted a balanced approach. They launched diplomatic initiatives around the world. Beijing's grand demarche yielded significant results during the 1970s, turning many erstwhile enemies into at least something akin to friends. Relations with the United States, Japan, and most of the ASEAN countries became almost cordial. At the same time, the PRC reduced considerably its support for insurgencies. As tensions with Hanoi grew, Beijing was careful to keep its criticisms of the Vietnamese low-keyed and oblique.

The Chinese offered positive inducements to the Vietnamese and generally avoided threats. As late as January 1978, the PRC was willing to continue its aid program with the SRV.¹ Importantly, Beijing exhibited restraint, which had the effect of slowing the pace of critical events. All of these things contributed to keeping the situation under control. In effect, the PRC was behaving in a manner that contributed to successful crisis management as described by Holsti.

The Chinese saw this to be the best approach for a number of reasons. On the home front, the PRC was faced with two major challenges which could be met more effectively if China's foreign relations were stable. In the political arena, the Chinese were facing an imminent change in leadership, with both Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai seriously ill in late 1975. In the economic realm, the PRC had launched the Four Modernizations program in January 1975, and Beijing hoped to concentrate its full attention and resources on domestic development. On the international scene, the PRC had largely abjured revolutionary people's war as a primary instrument of foreign policy and had adopted a more orthodox approach of interstate diplomacy. Beijing was pursuing a policy of cultivating good relations with the capitalist world--especially the United States and Japan--and of presenting itself as the moral leader of the Third World. This stance by the PRC leadership had two important salutary effects. It placed a premium on restraint in China's foreign policy, and it gave Beijing a wider range of options in dealing with international problems.

On the other hand, the Chinese made a serious error in allying themselves with the Khmer Rouge. The Pol Pot regime antagonized the Vietnamese from the very start. The Cambodians looked upon the Vietnamese much as the Vietnamese looked upon the Chinese, i.e., from the

perspective of a smaller country which feared being dominated by its larger neighbor. The Cambodian leaders perceived their range of options to be very narrow. The fanatical Khmer Rouge ideology and the general isolation of Cambodia from the international community engendered in the Pol Pot regime the conviction that its only effective response to Viet Nam was one of hostility. Since Beijing really could do little to control the Cambodian Communists, they surrendered much of their own independence of action in the region by this ill advised alliance.

The Vietnamese perceived their options to be fewer than those available to the Chinese. First, the historical trend was one of China's attempting to dominate Viet Nam, not the other way around. Second, the SRV had a large and wealthy ethnic Chinese population within its borders, but the PRC had no comparable Vietnamese presence within its national boundaries. Third, Hanoi saw the economic relationship between China and Viet Nam to be one-sided. Beijing was free to exert economic leverage on Hanoi, but Hanoi was in no position to reciprocate. Viet Nam had been exhausted by years of warfare, while China was beginning to enjoy a measure of economic revival. Fourth, the Vietnamese thought that the PRC was in a much stronger international position than the SRV. Much of the world was beating on Beijing's door in the late 1970s: desiring closer diplomatic relations, courting the PRC in the global power game, indulging their fancies with the indefatigable myth of the China market. Viet Nam saw that it could not hope to compete with this. In short, Hanoi perceived a distinct lack symmetry in the relative positions to the PRC and the SRV. Hanoi looked at its relationship with Beijing as if Viet Nam were the fish on the line and China the fisherman. The Chinese could execute tension or slack as they saw

fit, but the Vietnamese could only struggle to extend the line. Any other course of action would result in their being reeled in.

From this frame of reference, Hanoi developed its own "calculus of deterrence." Since the SRV leaders thought they were at such a great disadvantage, their calculus was one primarily of belligerence. They wished to signal to the Chinese that they were not going to be bullied. Hanoi's actions after 1975 were not unlike Beijing's actions after 1949, as described by Whiting. The Vietnamese resorted to the rhetoric of accusation and warning. The SRV maintained steady pressure along its borders. Hanoi was quick to call on Moscow for support. In addition to this, the Vietnamese were able to signal their displeasure to Beijing by the harsh measures taken against the Overseas Chinese. Because Hanoi was the weaker party, yet supported by the Soviet Union, it thought it could influence Chinese behavior by hostile measures without having to suffer devastating consequences. The SRV would make the PRC deal with it on its own terms, and thereby force the Chinese to relinquish many of their natural advantages. As a result, the Vietnamese leaders did not appear to try to understand why China did pose a threat and to act in a way to reduce that threat. Instead, they took actions that could only inflame the issue. They began massive persecutions of the Overseas Chinese in Viet Nam, and they drew close to the Soviet Union.

The heart of the crisis was in this conflict of perceptions. Each side was using a different perspective in viewing its own and the other side's position, and each side was determined that its will would prevail.

Reacting under Stress

In the spring of 1978, Hanoi began an intensive campaign against the Chinese residents of Viet Nam. At this time Beijing began reacting much more belligerently. Now, China's crisis management approximated more closely the "calculus of deterrence" model that had characterized it in 1950 and 1962. Likewise, the Chinese leaders started to exhibit those characteristics of action that typify decision-making under stress as described by Ole Holsti. They began to perceive time differently, feeling constrained by it rather than using it to their advantage. They thought the range of credible responses open to them was diminishing, and their rhetoric and actions became more belligerent. What attempts Beijing had made earlier to understand Hanoi's frame of reference and limitation of action were now put aside. Ultimately, this led to open war.

Chinese Deterrence

China may be one of the few countries, perhaps the only country, that has a coherent strategy for genuinely limited war: limited in both tactical and strategic objective, limited in means, and--especially--limited in time. It stems, to a large extent, from China's appreciation of its limited ability to project its power. For Beijing the limited, punitive war is one more way, drastic indeed, of delivering a signal. It is part of the total package of the "Chinese calculus of deterrence." At the onset of military operations, Beijing makes several points clear. The war will be quick. The PLA does not intend to conquer the enemy country or overthrow its government. The PLA does not even intend to

defeat the enemy army in the sense of making it ineffective as a fighting force. What the PRC is determined to do is quite literally punish its adversary. The PLA will inflict massive casualties on the enemy army, and it will not spare any civilians who happen to get in the way, either. Maximum physical destruction will be visited upon select areas of the enemy's country that are of secondary importance. When this has occurred, the PLA will clear out. This is precisely what happened in Viet Nam in 1979.

The war lasted officially from 17 February to 15 March 1979. Most of the intense fighting was over, however, by 5 March, when the PLA announced it was commencing its withdrawal.² The Chinese did inflict heavy casualties on the Vietnamese (estimated at about 50,000)³ and wrought massive damage on the northern border regions of the SRV, most notably on the city of Lang Son.⁴ This followed the pattern that had been established with the Indian War of 1962, although the Indian War was far less bloody and destructive.

There is considerable debate as to whether the PRC "won" or "lost" the war, whether the credit or debit side of the ledger came out with the larger bottom line. These are certainly legitimate questions, for the Chinese suffered considerably themselves.⁵ Rather than addressing these problems, however, it is more appropriate to this study to understand that the limited war has been, and most likely still is, an integral part of Chinese strategy, of Chinese crisis management, of the "Chinese calculus of deterrence."

This concept of deterrence is not new to the PRC. The relevance of history is again in evidence, for the concept has deep roots in Chinese tradition. Sunzi expressed many of the ideas that can be seen in the deterrence policy of the PRC. Use stratagems and displays to deter the

opponent short of war. When war is employed as an instrument of strategy, conclude it as quickly as possible. Do not seek the annihilation⁶ of the enemy. Always allow a defeated enemy a way out. The goal of this strategy is to restore harmony, to restore the proper weave of the tapestry. While it would be a mistake to equate the thought of Sunzi with that of the modern PRC leadership, the notions he propounded still would appear to exercise much influence in China.

The SRV presented the PRC with a strategic threat by an aggressive expression of its national identity coupled with a close relationship with the Soviet Union. Viet Nam challenged China's credibility openly and repeatedly over several contentious issues. Beijing sought to deter Hanoi's unacceptable behavior through a series of signals: political, economic, psychological, diplomatic, and ultimately military. The Chinese were trying to repair the tapestry.

An Index of Indicators

The escalation of Chinese responses from the beginning of 1978 up to the war can be traced along an index of indicators. On the one hand, this index considers the contentious issues that triggered a Chinese reaction. On the other hand, it examines the Chinese signal itself in terms of its delivery, intensity, authority, and timing.

Oblique Moderate Signalling

At the beginning of 1978, the PRC was continuing its carrot-and-stick policy of relative restraint. The main mode of signalling was oblique and included positive as well as negative inducements. On 4 January 1978, Beijing indicated the importance it placed on the Overseas

Chinese issue by announcing in Ren Min Ri Bao the reestablishment of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission at ministerial level.⁷ This was rather mild in tone and indirect in nature, avoiding pointing the finger too specifically at Hanoi. On 10 January the PRC published accounts of the Vietnamese-Cambodian controversy giving the point of view of each side.⁸ On the same day, a Chinese aid package for the SRV was renewed. These signals addressed three major contentious issues--the Overseas Chinese, Cambodia, and Soviet influence--in a very moderate fashion.

Indirect Accusatory Signalling

The first quarter of 1978 saw a rekindling of the conflict along the border between Viet Nam and Cambodia. On 24 March 1978, Hanoi began another round of persecutions of the Overseas Chinese, and soon the flow of refugees became torrential. Beijing determined that its oblique, moderate messages had gone unheeded. In mid-May the PRC issued another series of signals, stronger than those sent earlier but still rather indirect. The pro-Beijing Hong Kong newspaper Wen Wei Pao, on 11 May and on 22 May, expressed the opinion that Hanoi's actions were anti-Chinese rather than anti-capitalist and that the Soviet Union was behind the whole problem.⁹ By blaming the Soviet Union--its number one enemy--Beijing was indicating to Hanoi its rising concern over the issue, and it was also giving the Vietnamese a way out. On 12 May Beijing announced that it would reduce its aid to the SRV because it was required to divert the monies thus saved to support the refugees coming into China.¹⁰ Here were elements of Chinese signalling that would be repeated throughout the crisis: a rhetorical offensive coupled with a symbolic (and often tangible) gesture. The signals were characterized by charges and accusations of Vietnamese malfeasance.

Direct Accusatory Signalling

On 24 May 1978, the gloves came off. The PRC launched a direct rhetorical attack on the SRV. There was no longer an effort to keep the accusations oblique and indirect. The charges no longer emanated simply from newspaper articles and editorials. Now they were being ascribed directly to the Foreign Ministry of the PRC. All of the major issues were raised: charges of Vietnamese persecution of Overseas Chinese, of Vietnamese aggression against Cambodia, and of Vietnamese collusion with the Soviets.¹¹ On 9 June the Chinese Foreign Ministry levelled another series of accusations at the SRV, and this time in much more acrimonious terminology.¹² Beijing was now escalating its attacks in authority, in intensity, and in tempo. The rhetoric was again accompanied by the gesture. The Khmer Rouge launched a vicious counterattack on 24 May. When the SRV joined COMECON in late June of 1978, the PRC responded by cutting off all aid as of 3 July.¹³

Face-to-Face Accusatory Signalling

On 19 July 1978 the PRC Foreign Ministry called for vice-ministerial negotiations with Hanoi. The central topic was to be the Overseas Chinese issue. The talks ran from 8 August to 26 September, but nothing was really negotiated. The PRC probably intended the meetings to be used primarily as a medium to deliver its signals and to be assured that those signals were being received. The signalling was immediate and direct; the sessions were at weekly intervals; and the level of authority was that of the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs. The nature of the signals continued to be mainly accusatory. Some

constructive recommendations were presented, and some efforts at reconciliation were made, but these took second place behind the charges¹⁴ and accusations.

While the talks were in progress, Beijing continued to signal by other means as well. Another mass media barrage against the SRV took place on 14 September, again covering all of the main issues of contention.¹⁵ Nor was the symbolic gesture abandoned. This took on a not atypical carrot-and-stick configuration. As the negotiations commenced in August, the Khmer Rouge made an offer of peace to Hanoi. Later in the month, when Beijing perceived Hanoi to be particularly unresponsive to its signals at talks, it withdrew its chief negotiator temporarily. The PRC withdrew its delegation altogether on 26 September, after only eight sessions and not even two months of talks. In October, however, the Cambodians renewed their peace offensive. Once more, the Vietnamese were being offered a face-saving way to reduce tensions by accommodating¹⁶ Chinese sensitivities.

Warning Signalling

On 3 November 1978, the SRV concluded its treaty with the USSR, replete with denunciations of Beijing issued from Moscow. The Chinese response indicated that another major phase-line had been passed. On 7 November the Chinese Foreign Ministry issued warnings to Hanoi of the seriousness of Vietnamese encroachments across the border into Chinese¹⁷ territory. Ren Min Ri Bao¹⁸ repeated the warnings in even stronger language on 10 November. This signalled an escalation in two ways. Charges and accusations were now accompanied by threats and warnings; and the border problem--the most volatile flash point--was

being emphasized as a primary contentious issue. China was signalling that war was not out of the question since violation of PRC territory would constitute a clear casus belli under international law.

On 13 December 1978, Li Xiannian warned Hanoi that "China's forbearance has its limits."¹⁹ Again, a warning had been presented; equally important, an escalation of the issuing authority had occurred. Li Xiannian was a vice-premier of the PRC and a member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo of the PRC. He was one of China's highest leaders.

China's most serious threat to date was made on 24 December 1978. In an effort to deter Hanoi's imminent assault on Cambodia, Ren Min Ri Bao²⁰ warned that the PRC would "counterattack," if attacked.

On 31 December 1978, Beijing took the symbolic action of recalling its ambassador to Hanoi;²¹ and, on 4 January 1979, the PRC made another gesture by cutting off rail service between China and Viet Nam.²²

On 4 January 1979, Beijing asserted that Hanoi was engaged in "frenzied provocations" along the border.²³

On 5 January 1979, Deng Xiaoping expressed condemnation of the SRV invasion of Cambodia.²⁴ Once more, a top PRC leader had spoken out.

On 7 January 1979, the PLA cancelled all leaves.²⁵ Now a direct military gesture had been made.

The PRC issued major accusations and warnings regarding Vietnamese border provocations, subsequently, on 8 January, 12 January, 15 January, 18 January, 20 January, 27 January, and 29 January 1979.²⁶ The authority, intensity, and tempo of the signals was increasing.

Deng Xiaoping's visit to the United States (28 January-4 February 1979) presented him with a special forum from which to signal to the Vietnamese. The world's attention was on him, and his words could

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hardly go unnoticed. Also, he may have savored engaging in a bit of retaliation in kind for the harsh remarks made by the Vietnamese leaders in Moscow directed against the PRC the previous November. Deng issued threats and warnings to Hanoi on almost a daily basis while he was in America. On 31 January he gave his famous speech saying that China would have to "teach" Viet Nam "a lesson."²⁷ This theme continued during Deng's stop in Tokyo (6-8 February). On 7 February he maintained that "Vietnam must be punished" for its war in Cambodia and for col-²⁸ lusion with the USSR.

The PRC sent a stream of warnings to the SRV after Deng's return. They were published on 10 February, 11 February, 15 February, and 16 February 1979;²⁹ and they included a final admonition from Li Xiannian³⁰ advising Hanoi to take heed of all China's previous signals. These threats centered on what would be the immediate, legitimate casus belli, Vietnamese violations of the PRC-SRV border. Beijing set up a command structure and began moving large numbers of PLA troops into the border region.

Hanoi responded by signing a protocol with Moscow on 16 February³¹ 1979, and the Chinese invasion commenced on 17 February.

An Examination of the Index

Contentious Issues

The PRC considered three contentious issues to be at the heart of its difficulties with the SRV: Viet Nam's challenge to Chinese credibility by its "aggression" against China's ally Cambodia; Hanoi's challenge to Chinese "face" by its open persecution of the Overseas Chinese; and the SRV's challenge to Chinese strategic security by its

closeness to the Soviet Union. A fourth major contentious issue, the PRC-SRV land border dispute, illustrated an interesting phenomenon in the signalling process. In and of itself, the border issue was relatively minor; only a small amount of real estate with little economic or strategic value was open to question. The border problem, however, became a test of national will and a focal point for expressing the hostilities generated by the other contentious issues. It took on an extremely important role in the Chinese signalling process. By stressing the SRV's violations of the border, the PRC was sending a very strong message since the armed crossing of an international border is an act of war.

Delivery Index

An escalation in the means and manner by which Beijing delivered its signals can be seen.

- (1) Indirect expressions of concern by diplomatic gestures and through third party media.
- (2) Direct expressions of concern through the PRC media.
- (3) Direct expressions of concern in government-to-government messages.
- (4) Direct expressions of concern in extended formal talks.
- (5) Direct expressions of concern in public statements by the highest PRC officials.

Intensity Index

As the crisis continued, the intensity level of the signals increased. Not only did the words and gestures become more acrimonious and bitter, but their nature changed as well.

- (1) Moderate rhetoric and diplomatic pressure.
- (2) Accusatory rhetoric and hostile diplomatic gestures.
- (3) Threatening rhetoric, hostile diplomatic gestures, and military activity.
- (4) Open, limited war.

Authority Index

Another important aspect of the signalling process was the authority of the public source. As critical phase-lines in the crisis were crossed, higher levels of authority were invoked.

- (1) Third party media and normal diplomatic channels.
- (2) Unattributed articles and editorials in the PRC media.
- (3) Governmental bureaucracy at the vice-ministerial and ministerial levels.
- (4) Public statements by the highest PRC officials.

Timing Index

In his studies of the Korean and Indian wars, Allen Whiting has paid special attention to the timing of Chinese signals. They were given at regular intervals; and, as the crisis intensified, the time between signals decreased. Determining timing configurations of the signals is difficult because the message traffic between two hostile

nations almost always carries some form of signal or another. The task is to separate major signals from supporting signals and identify major signal blocks. Major signals indicate a new element in the crisis, a new direction or initiative, a change in the intensity or emphasis, and other such critical markers. Examining the other indices of indicators can help to establish the timing index. Chinese signals during the year prior to the Sino-Vietnamese War do appear to have followed a general pattern similar to that discerned by Whiting in his studies of the PRC's previous wars.

(1) Sporadic signalling during period of restraint prior to May 1978.

(2) Usually, one major signal block per month between May and the end of October 1978.

(3) At least three major signal blocks between the signing of the Soviet-Vietnamese treaty on 3 November 1978 and the invasion of Cambodia on 25 December.

(4) Major signal blocks at least once a week after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia.

Utility of the Index

As Holsti has indicated, the biggest potential benefit that can come from studying crisis development is learning to implement more effective crisis management. The index of indicators developed here may be of some assistance in advancing an understanding of how crises come about. Greater understanding will not be sufficient in itself to better crisis management, but it is one ingredient that should help preclude blundering into serious international problems through misperceptions.

The index should be helpful in the interpretation of signals, which can lead to developing more accurate readings of perceptions. One of the biggest stumbling blocks to skillful crisis management is the misperception of one's own and one's opponent's range of options. The index of indicators may be applied to study the correlation of action and signal. If there is a pattern of association between particular actions and signals, it may serve as a guide to determining the direction and level of a crisis. This may be useful in preventing actions based on a miscalculation of signals and in taking actions more likely to lead to crisis resolution.

An examination of the Sino-Vietnamese crisis of 1975-1979 using the index of indicators can shed some light on the development of a dispute between a big power and a small power. The small power often can force its will on the larger power to an extent hardly expected. The phenomenon of the crisis between a great power and a small power--with less than totally satisfactory results for the great power--has become rather prevalent since the end of World War II.

The index of indicators may be of aid to the American analyst in identifying how countries perceive their own interests and options and those of others. This can lead the American decision-maker to formulate policies which advance US strategic interests while minimizing the dangers of war and other international hostilities.

The historical case study and the index of indicators presented here should be used along with other case studies and indices. Greater precision in the understanding of crisis behavior will come as more studies are made. Allen Whiting's works on the Korean and Indian wars are basic. Several good monographs have appeared dealing with various aspects of the Sino-Vietnamese crisis treated here. The methodology

used in these historical case studies may prove helpful if applied to the Sino-Soviet border crisis of 1969 or to the PRC's use of revolutionary warfare in Southeast Asia.

A Caveat

Caution must always be exercised in developing any model from an historical case study. The index of indicators described above is by no means exhaustive. It may be helpful, however, in shedding some light on the path that took China to war with Viet Nam in 1979 and on the broader landscape of how China reacts in international crises.

The individual steps or stages within the various indices do not exclude elements from other steps and stages. They do point to what can be considered the primary mode of signalling for a given period. Different means of delivery, different echelons of authority, and different amounts of intensity may be wrapped up in various signals that are being issued during the same period. Generally, one level will predominate in importance; this is usually--but not always--the highest level. Furthermore, a higher stage does not necessarily have to follow immediately on a lower stage. There can be a zigzag pattern in crisis development.

Greater understanding of the phenomena of crisis development and crisis management involving the PRC requires integrating as many individual indices as possible into a broad index of indicators.

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